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Nurturing Emergent Agency:
Networks and Dynamics of Complex Social Change Processes in
Raipur, India

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis takes up the question, how can agency for people living in informal settlements be strengthened? To address this question, I carried out systemic action research with two NGO partners and residents from seven informal settlements in Raipur, India. This involved organizing 'slum improvement committees' (SICs) in each of the seven settlements and carrying out joint actions in support of housing rights and implementation of the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) housing policy. The data on which my analysis is based includes over one hundred conversations between myself and the project participants (both from the settlements as well as the partner NGOs), records of two public events, a social network survey of 46 people living in the participating settlements, a separate set of 9 participatory social network maps (NetMaps), and over two hundred pages of my own field notes based on my observations and participation in the research activities. My thesis makes an original contribution to the study of community agency by analysing it through the lens of complex systems theories and utilising the tools of social network analysis. My thesis also makes an original contribution to research methodology by making the technical analysis participatory, accessible, and useful for the participants. This allowed me to combine analysis of relational structures (social networks) with relational dynamics to show how significant social change happened over the course of the project. My thesis suggests that agency can be strengthened through an organizing practice that brings NGOs, academic researchers, and residents of informal settlements together to build relational power, take collective action, and create social change.

Acknowledgements

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I want to thank my supervisors, Danny and Deepta, for guiding me throughout my PhD journey and for helping me write the best thesis I could write. I also want to thank my friends and family whose love and support have sustained me during this endeavour.

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List of individuals appearing in the text:

Participants from the informal settlements¹:

Shakti Nagar:

Janisha – SIC member, married to Motilal

Motilal – milk distributor, spoke some English and spent time telling me his life story

Aditya – Leprosy survivor and activist, well-connected with national and international public health and leprosy advocacy organizations.



Shanti Nagar:

Sukanya Banerjee – SIC member who stopped participating because of domestic conflict

Suchi – SIC member whose husband died of jaundice

Smt. Chaturwedi – During the public meeting reported in the blog post, she argued that residents were forced to act as a ‘vote bank’, but that politicians could not be trusted after elections. She did not become a member of the SIC.



Gandhi Nagar:

Ragini – One of the main active SIC members from Gandhi Nagar. Her home was the site of most meetings held in Gandhi Nagar.



Shiv Nagar 1:

Devki *didi* – Experienced organizer and Bangladeshi refugee

Lalita – SIC member who worked as a nurse and maintained no political affiliations. She gained leadership experience taking public action through the project, and was likely encouraged to take on a leadership role in the SIC by Devki as Devki withdrew from directly participating.



¹ I have assigned each informal settlement an image that corresponds to its name. These images appear beside the text whenever their corresponding settlement is discussed. This may help the reader attach a mental image to each settlement since no further geographical detail can be provided.

Shiv Nagar 2:

Vinika – managed the school in Shiv Nagar 2. She was sporadically active in the SIC

Shomita – woman with no public experience looking to find a way to make her community better.

Lakshmi Nagar:

Amrit – local fixer with connections to the BJP.

Ambedkar Nagar:

Keshav – local fixer with connections to the BJP

Dinesh – resident, furniture-maker, new to active public action.

**NGO Partners:**

Nidhi – director of Chetna, active participant in the SCSVUP project

Amrita – PRIA staff in charge of the SCSVUP project activities in Raipur

Subhash – My full-time translator and research assistant.

Councillors:

The Councillor – President of the City Council, *parshad* of the ward containing Shiv Nagar 2 settlement

Mr Singh – *parshad* of the ward containing both Lakshmi Nagar and Gandhi Nagar settlements.

Others:

Jitesh *bhai* – Chairman (Mandal Adhyaksh) of the Labour Welfare Board (Shram Kalyan Mandal)

Tarun Chatterjee – Former mayor of Raipur, well known political ‘maverick’ of Bengali ethnicity.

Acronyms:

PRIA – Participatory Research In Asia

RAY – Rajiv Awas Yojana, the Rajiv (Gandhi) Housing Policy

SPARC – Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers

Initialisms:

BSUP – Basic Services for the Urban Poor

DPR - detailed project report

FIR – first incident report

IDS – Institute of Development Studies

IIHMR – Indian Institute of Health Management Research

JnNURM – Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission

NSDF – National Slum Dwellers Federation

RDA – Raipur Development Authority

RMC – Raipur Municipal Corporation, also known as the Nagar Nigam

SAR – Systemic Action Research

SCSVUP – The Strengthening Civil Society Voices on Urban Poverty project

SDI – Shack/Slum Dwellers International

SIC – Slum Improvement Committee, the direct translation of Basti Vikas Samiti.

Pronounced ‘S.I.C.’ rather than ‘sick’

SNA – Social Network Analysis

Hindi words appearing in the text²:

Anganwaadi – A central-government sponsored centre staffed by a social worker responsible for outreach, administration of public health programmes, and child care and basic education

Basti – literally settlement, but often used in Hindi as equivalent to informal settlement or ‘slum’, though without the negative connotations that ‘slum’ often carries

² Hindi words appear in the text in *italics*, except in cases of proper nouns. In cases where italics would normally be used to indicate emphasis, I have used an underline.

Bhaiya, Bhai – directly translated as ‘big brother’, having a connotation of respect and deference

Chai – tea, generally. Usually served with milk and sugar, and only rarely spiced. It is usually obligatory to serve a guest chai, and not being able to offer chai with milk is a source of shame for some people living in the informal settlements.

Dal chawal – lentils and rice, a staple across Indian cuisine, but particularly important in the diets of people living in poverty

Dukkan – small convenience store

Gali or *Gully* – small street, not etymologically related to the English word of the same spelling

Goonda - thug, hired goon

Janjagran Samiti – Committee for People’s Awakening, the central steering committee made up of representatives from each of the seven SIC groups

Jugaad – also transliterated as *jugaar*; the informal social practice of making use of limited materials available to patch up or rig something so as to get by

Karyakarta – workers, activists

Kushta basti – leper colony

Mandal Adhyaksh – Board Chairman

Mandir – small temple, often the focus of community collective action

Mazdoor – day labourer, usually in construction work

Mohalla – neighbourhood, usually a smaller unit than the English word

‘neighbourhood’; usually only up to 3 or 4 streets (settlement streets usually being referred to as ‘lanes’ or gullies)

Nagar Nigam – municipal corporation; in common parlance, the Raipur Nagar Nigam is simply called Nagar Nigam or RMC for Raipur Municipal Corporation

Nala – natural or artificially constructed channel for water drainage; often the path for wastewater runoff, which in Raipur was the same for rainwater runoff

Nazul – refers to land owned by a government authority but managed by a subsidiary agency

Parshad – elected representative, member of the City Council

Patta – used here to refer to a document ensuring some ambiguous claim to housing rights

Rajma – beans, often prepared as a thick, spicy stew

Samiti - committee

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This thesis explores the agency of people living in informal settlements, focusing especially on how agency can be strengthened. Namely, this thesis takes an approach that focuses on building and strengthening relationships as a pathway to strengthening agency. Agency is the capacity to take action to make a difference, and as such, strengthened agency can be evidenced by a) subjective perception that one's ability to take action to make a difference has increased, b) the taking of action that had previously not been taken (typically where such action was likely not possible or perceived to not have been possible, even if only because no one had been able to think of it). In this thesis, I do not consider agency to be something that can be directly measured, but I do make use of other measurements to draw conclusions about agency. For example, one's position within a social network has implications for one's ability to take action, and it therefore is a way of interrogating levels of agency.

This thesis advances thinking on political society by making use of it as an analytical tool. It advances thinking about mediation (especially patronage) by detailed study of local 'fixers' and a proposed framework for understanding relations between people living in informal settlements and their elected representatives. It contributes empirical data on the social structures of people living in informal settlements, proposing and testing a new method of capturing the impact of Indian Alliance-type organizing interventions on the social networks of participants, and thus the impact on agency. It contributes a new understanding of how organizing practice (especially that involved in the Indian Alliance-type organizing approach) can be used to build genuine relationships between people living in informal settlements and the NGOs and academic researchers that want to 'help' them strengthen their agency. Finally, this thesis advances methodologies and analysis of social systems as complex adaptive systems. This advances our understanding of agency as a complex phenomenon by moving past complexity as a metaphor and laying the groundwork for a complex social science.

A vast literature is developing in the social sciences suggesting that inequalities are not simply unjust, but that they negatively impact a host of social and economic aspects. The existence of informal economies (Harriss-White, 2010) and informal settlements is a product of inequalities (Lindell, 2010; Roy, 2005), and from these

places of concentrated inequalities, people face inequalities of opportunity and inequalities of agency (Appadurai, 2004; Rao and Walton, 2004a; Sen, 1999, 2004). Many governments around the world, including that of India, have articulated legal frameworks guaranteeing the equal status of all citizens, though in practice citizens are not equal, not even under the law. Much has been written about the differentiated citizenship in India, especially about how those parts of the population that cannot rely on their legally guaranteed citizenship rights make special claims to exceptional rights at the collective level through informal means – the so-called political society (Chatterjee, 2004; Gudavarthy, 2012). This political society thinking has emerged from the rich academic tradition of subaltern studies – a collective endeavour among Indian academics to find and amplify the voices of those members of society that have been and are being excluded from society (Spivak, 2005). Though I had never been to India before this research, I am honoured that my thesis sits within part of that tradition, and carries forward the attempt to understand subaltern agency. Beyond this, my thesis seeks to explore how to strengthen that agency. To do this, I lived and worked with a team of people in Raipur – made up of people living in informal settlements and others working with NGOs – who were engaged in a multi-year project to try to strengthen agency of all the actors around the issue of urban poverty.

The persistence of inequalities, along with the fact that such inequalities result from and result in constrained agency, suggests that agency itself should be a focus of research. Agency (Boyte, 2005; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; D. Narayan et al., 2009) is the capacity to act, and it has both individual and collective manifestations. In all cases, agency is a social phenomenon – and thus a relational phenomenon. It refers to the capacity to act, within society. It is thus subject to all the factors in society that facilitate or constrain people's abilities to act. To understand agency, we must understand social structures. But more than this, we cannot understand agency as something only in tension with structure. Building on the agency literature, this thesis makes a conceptual advance – conceiving of agency as an emergent property of complex social systems. If agency is an emergent property, it certainly depends on social structure, but not only. There must be other attributes of complex social systems that impact the emergence of agency.

Here I draw on the notion from generative social science (Epstein, 2007) of explaining emergence of systemic attributes by making reference to the relevant parts of the system as well as their interaction rules. It is often said that 'the whole is more than

the sum of the parts', but we understand the sometimes counterintuitive aspects of the whole by considering the parts and their interaction dynamics.

A classic example of a complex adaptive system is that of an ant nest (Miller and Page, 2007; Traniello, 1989). Individual ants do not 'know' how to build nests, nor do they have the ability to articulate the concepts of temperature, humidity, or their regulation. Yet, collectively, ant colonies build nests that do regulate temperature and humidity quite precisely. These properties emerge from the interactions of the ants. While the ants don't 'know' what they are doing, they follow relatively simple rules for interacting with each other, and by doing so the properties at the nest or colony level emerge. The nest is more than the sum of individual ants that each lack intelligence. But still, understanding the un-intelligent individual ant along with the simple interaction rules is all that is required to explain 'intelligence' at the colony level. This has been achieved quite elegantly by social scientists using computational agent-based models (see for example, Axelrod, 1997; Bonabeau, 2002; Janssen and Ostrom, 2006).

Another example, perhaps more illustrative of the kind of problem posed by agency, is the emergence of consciousness through the interactions of neurons in the human brain. Though it remains an unsolved riddle, the science around the phenomenon of consciousness is currently making great leaps (Sporns, 2011). Yet, even if the emergence of consciousness is ultimately explained by a generative model, consciousness remains an experiential phenomenon. That is, the only way to truly understand what it means to be conscious is to experience it. While explaining how consciousness emerges from the complex neuronal system will greatly advance human understanding of consciousness, and even perhaps how to beneficially alter consciousness (for example to treat mental illness or to improve cognitive functioning), any understanding will be incomplete without incorporating a phenomenological approach (Harris, 2014).

I posit that agency is analogous to human consciousness in that it emerges within the context of complex social systems and that explanations of agency must include a phenomenological treatment, since experiential aspects of agency are not reducible to computational models. That is why, in this thesis, I have brought together analytical approaches capable of seeing, tinkering with, and learning about complex social systems based in the informal settlements of Raipur with relational, qualitative, and participatory approaches to learning about human experience of life in those systems.

In 2006, shortly after I completed a BS in Physics from Texas A&M University, I went to Iceland and found work in Iceland's first and only artificial intelligence lab, founded and managed by an Icelandic who had a computer science PhD from MIT (CADIA, 2008). I spent my days coding in C++ for a piece of software that allowed an AI character to differentiate between when people in a room were talking amongst themselves and when they were talking to it. It used a directional microphone as well to determine the location of the speaker, so that its eyes could turn in the speaker's direction in response to the voice. During lunchtime and coffee break discussions, however, my imagination was captivated by stories from MIT and elsewhere about advances being made on both the computational and neurophysiological aspects of (artificial) intelligence and how they were flowing from the maturing science of complex adaptive systems.

Later, I completed my Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Minnesota, where I focused on civic agency in the context of development studies and employed participatory action research methods to study urban neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty (in this case the predominantly Somali neighbourhood of Cedar-Riverside near the university campus in Minneapolis). Inspired by the lessons on complexity and emergence from the AI lab, I saw the need to apply a complexity framework to understanding how urban neighbourhoods function. Other scholars like Sam Bowles (Bowles et al., 2006) and Robert Sampson (Sampson and Morenoff, 2006; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999) had recently shown counterintuitive ways in which poverty persisted because of complex overlapping issues, displaying resilience in poor neighbourhoods even as the neighbourhood occupants came and went. But to my knowledge, no one had yet connected the dots to see neighbourhoods as actual complex systems.

I took this idea with me when I got the chance to attend the Santa Fe Institute's Complex Systems Summer School in 2008. There I learned techniques for researching complexity and met interesting people like Olaf Sporns – who had been behind many of the neuroscience advances I had been hearing about (See for example, Bullmore and Sporns, 2009; Rubinov and Sporns, 2010; Sporns et al., 2005, 2004; Tononi et al., 1994) – and Geoff West – who was innovating methods of capturing the complexity of cities (Bettencourt and West, 2010). I joined in with a group of political scientists, mathematicians, and computer scientists to update a computational model of civil

violence (Epstein, 2002) using the Netlogo (Wilensky, 2015) agent-based modelling software (Martin et al., 2009).

I held on to these ideas, developing them further through my own reading, and trying to work through the tensions between the abstract science approach of the Santa Fe Institute and the demands of particular development contexts for participatory and action research projects. Finally, the opportunity arose to pursue this thinking when I met with Danny Burns at the University of Sussex and the Participation Team, who agreed to supervise my PhD. Here I saw a chance to advance both lines of inquiry – to explore synthesizing technical methods capable of capturing non-trivial³ aspects of complex systems with participatory methods capable of taking local agency seriously.

For my thesis, I initially explored the use of computational models to investigate agency, but ultimately I chose not to pursue them. Human societies may be like ant colonies in that our societies also exhibit emergent properties, but our interaction rules are anything but simple. This thesis is, only in part, about finding those interaction rules – those social dynamics – that impact how agency emerges. Rather, like consciousness emerging in a human brain, there is something irreducibly phenomenological about agency. We may one day come to explain precisely how certain actions lead to other actions, but we will never be able to explain what it's like and what it means to have agency unless we experience it. Thus, for this thesis, I had to depart somewhat from the Santa Fe approach to complexity research, but without abandoning their commitment to rigor and empirically grounded research.

³ In using the term 'non-trivial', I follow mathematical convention recognizing that problems often have multiple solutions, including some that are not very informative. For example, $x + 3y = 0$ has a solution where x and y are both equal to zero. This is not an informative solution, however. It is a 'trivial' solution. A non-trivial solution would be $x=-3$ and $y=1$. In making use of the phrase in the context of understanding complex systems, I draw attention to the fact that certain conclusions about complexity can be trivial, or uninformative. For example, Samir Rihani (2002) has argued that international development is a complex system and, from this, concludes that it is impossible to predict the impact of action on the system. While this may be a valid conclusion, it is trivial in that it fails to illuminate substantial implications for how to engage in action.

In the social sciences, we need complexity as a metaphor, but we must also find a way to move beyond metaphor. Beyond the qualitative versus quantitative debate, we need to draw on technical methods of analysing complex social systems as well as participatory and dialogical methods of bringing together a plurality of narratives and perspectives to make meaning out of human experience in complex social systems. That is what I have attempted with this thesis. I hope it advances our collective capacities to understand human endeavour, and I look forward to continuing down this path through future research.

1.1. Research Context and the SCSVUP Project

India is undergoing a sustained period of economic growth, which is both driven by cities and driving people to cities (World Bank, 2011). In the decade from 2001 to 2011, India added 91 million people to its cities and towns and only 90.4 million to agricultural areas, which is the first time that urban areas have grown faster than rural (Lahiri, 2011). The percent of the population that is urban rose 3.35 percentage points in that time, which means 31.16% of India's population lives in urban areas (Lahiri, 2011). A recent 'demographic explosion' means a 'baby-boom' generation is coming of working age (Bloom, 2012), needing jobs but also providing a source of economic growth. The number of cities with population of at least 100,000 increased from 24 in 1901 to 393 in 2001, doubling every 20 years from 1941 (Lokpriy, 2009). As of 2010, there were 42 cities with populations greater than 1 million, and that number is expected to increase to 68 by 2030 (Sankhe et al., 2010).

There is disagreement over whether urbanization is being driven primarily by people fleeing rural poverty ('push' factors) or by people being drawn to economic opportunities in cities ('pull' factors) (Datta, 2006). This has major implications for the way urbanization plays out: do people fail to find opportunities and end up miserable and hopeless, stuck in informal areas of concentrated poverty, cut off from government services and mainstream society (Datta, 2006), or do they contribute to increasing productivity and share in the benefits? The McKinsey Global Institute report in April 2010 was hopeful about the latter possibility, projecting that 70 percent of net employment increases will occur in cities (Sankhe et al., 2010). However, serious challenges regarding planning, policy, and infrastructure must be met in order to avoid

the first scenario (World Bank, 2011). The McKinze report suggests that current policies would lead India to ‘urban decay’ (Sankhe et al., 2010, p. 53).

As of 2002, India’s development could be seen to be uneven, with increasing inequalities within cities, within states, and favouring areas of the south and west rather than the north and east (Deaton and Dreze, 2002). Urbanization and the associated patterns of migration are putting strains on social structures and cultural traditions (Chowdhury, 2012). Meanwhile, social networks have been shown to facilitate and structure migration patterns as people decide to move from rural to urban areas (Hansraj and Nangia, 2009).

As India continues to urbanize in this way, it is likely that most of the urban population growth will occur in the smaller cities (populations less than 500,000) (Manohar and Nargundkar Pathak, 2011). Raipur became the capital of the state of Chhattisgarh when it was formed in 2000, and in line with this type of urbanization, its population grew from 606,000 in 2001 to 1.01 million in 2011 (Census Organization of India, 2012). In 2001, it was estimated that 226,000 people in Raipur (more than 1/3 of the population) lived in slums (Indiastat, 2012).

The research for this thesis was carried out in Raipur in the context of the rollout of the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) – the Rajiv (Gandhi) Housing Policy – which is the latest iteration of the Central Government’s national urban renewal mission. This has involved a series of progressive policies including the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM) and the Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP) which have been implemented in a piecemeal fashion subject to local level political dynamics and, therefore, been only modestly successful in impacting urban poverty (Kamath, 2012; Kundu, 2013).

The RAY is, at least on paper, an innovative policy with the stated goal of making India ‘slum free’ by engaging residents of informal settlements in an in-situ redevelopment process. Under the policy, residents should form a neighbourhood committee responsible for coordinating the participatory planning process, liaising with contractors and government officials, and managing the upkeep of whatever collective facilities are installed during the development. Projects would be funded 50% by the Central Government, 40% by the State Government, and 10% by the recipients (Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2013a, 2013b). Decisions about which upgrades should be made, quality and design of upgrades, and choices of collective facilities would be negotiated between the residents, the municipal

corporation, and the relevant private sector contractors. The final plans would be formalized in a single city-wide Detailed Project Report (DPR), which would be sent to the Central Government for approval.

The impending rollout of the RAY became the basis for an intervention by PRIA and SPARC, two national-level NGOs. PRIA is based in Delhi and is known for carrying out high quality action research projects across India and for being a strong advocate of dispossessed people in India (Tandon, 2002a). SPARC, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers is the NGO arm of the Indian Alliance – which is itself one of the most high profile organizations of dispossessed people in the world, including Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), and Mahila Milan (Women’s Collective of pavement dwellers) (Patel and Bartlett, 2009; Patel and Mitlin, 2004). By 2011, the two organizations had decided to collaborate on a project to raise the profile of issues around urban poverty (PRIA, 2011). Their joint project was called Strengthening Civil Society Voices on Urban Poverty (henceforth referred to as SCSVUP), and was carried out in cities across India for over two years. PRIA carried out projects in Raipur, Patna, and Jaipur, while SPARC carried out projects in about 30 other cities around India.

For the Raipur SCSVUP project, PRIA partnered with an experienced local NGO, Chetna. Chetna is headed by Nidhi, who has been working with women and children living in poverty in Raipur and all over Chhattisgarh (the state of which Raipur is the capital) for over two decades (Chetna, 2015). The PRIA office in Raipur was, at the time, staffed by only two full time officers. Amrita, the more junior of the two officers, was put in charge of the day to day operations of the SCSVUP project. I worked closely with both Nidhi and Amrita throughout my research.

PRIA and Chetna initially decided to attempt to work with ten informal settlements around Raipur. This was because the organizations wanted to work with as many settlements as possible during the opportunity presented by the RAY policy, but they had limited staff and resources. Together, the organizations selected about 15 settlements in which at least one of the NGOs had prior connections from previous project work. Initial assessments were made about interest level, and 10 settlements were chosen for intervention through the SCSVUP project. Of those 10, only 7 actually participated.

1.2. Research site and motivation

During my time studying public policy at the University of Minnesota, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet my capstone requirement⁴ through the Humphrey School of Public Policy's Cedar Humphrey Action for Neighborhood Collaborative Engagement (CHANCE) programme. This was a student-led initiative to bridge the divide between the Humphrey School (and the wider University of Minnesota) and the neighbourhood surrounding it in which many people (largely East African immigrants and refugees) lived in conditions of concentrated poverty. By following this path – taking opportunities available to me and connecting with people through genuine relationships – I ended up using my capstone research project to collaborate with Somali community leaders and activists to address some of their concerns about youth violence and unemployment.

Similarly, I was not set on a field site when I started my PhD. I followed opportunities available to me, connected to people, and managed to find myself in a genuine and productive relationship with leaders at PRIA in India. I had been hoping to find a team of people already engaged in action research who might be interested in having me contribute and add a complex systems element to the action research. I had explored possible research sites in other places including Turkey and Latvia, but the PRIA team and their SCSVUP project was perfect for me, and they seemed genuinely happy to have me work alongside their project.

Further, as India has urbanized, some unique trends in urban politics and urban organizing have emerged. Discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, India has been characterised as having a government that is 'dominant without hegemony' (Guha, 1997) – that is, the state is assertive and tries to provide services and citizenship to all citizens, but it lacks the power, governance capacities, and political will to effectively carry out this mandate. This has created a functional divide within Indian society, with a large portion of poor people failing to attain full citizenship in practice.

Partha Chatterjee argues that political society has been the result of this historical development in India. Political society is a set of practices and norms whereby those people living in informality and without full citizenship come to access the state and its resources strategically (and using a standard set of relational practices) as

⁴ A capstone project is roughly equivalent to a master's thesis, but written and researched as a team.

populations rather than as citizens (Chatterjee, 2004). Additionally, this state of differentiated citizenship has been met with sustained grassroots organizing efforts typified by the National Slum Dwellers Federation, Mahila Milan, and SPARC (together known as the Indian Alliance). These Indian Alliance-style organizing efforts are typically driven by people living in informal settlements or on the pavement. They have shown some promising successes improving their living conditions by forming activist coalitions with NGOs and engaging in co-production of services with the state where possible (Mitlin and Patel, 2014; Patel et al., 2012; Patel and Mitlin, 2004).

My research site was located squarely in this dynamic milieu: a collaborative multi-year action research project headed by SPARC and PRIA, seeking to organize in partnership with local associations of people living in informal settlements in over 30 Indian cities. In doing so, I was able to examine the Indian Alliance model of organizing, since there had previously been no such organizing effort or NSDF/Mahila Milan type organizations in Raipur. I was able to explore how such an organizing effort attempted to influence the development outcomes for the local partner participants. While the language of the SCSVUP project documentation discussed ‘civil society voices’ and ‘creating a buzz around the issues of urban poverty’ (PRIA, 2011), I understood their main goal to be ‘empowerment’ for people living in urban poverty – or simply to help strengthen the agency of people living in informal settlements. Over the course of the SCSVUP project, PRIA staff and their local NGO partner, Chetna, wrestled with the tensions inherent in such an approach – for example, who is included in civil society, exactly whose voice is to be strengthened, and how that voice should be strengthened? Through my exploration and analysis, I was able to answer the question at the heart of my PhD: how can agency be strengthened for people living in informal settlements?

1.3. Outline and chapter summaries

Given the contextual details, and the traditions of action research and organizing brought to the table by PRIA, Chetna, and SPARC, I chose to ground my contribution to the research in the concept of agency. I outline my conceptual framework in Chapter 2, and I start with the sociological turn towards agency over the last two decades. I argue that because agency is fundamentally relational and social, it is fundamentally complex. Understanding agency requires research methods and analytical methods

capable of capturing complexity. I introduce some basic concepts from the science of complex adaptive systems, and I lay out a ‘generative’ approach to social inquiry.

A generative approach requires taking account of types of actors, their relevant attributes, and the patterns according to which they interact, with the goal being to explain how activity at the micro level generates patterns at the meso or macro level. For this research, I posit that to understand agency and how it can be strengthened, we need ways of understanding people who live in informal settlements, their aspirations, and the patterns according to which they relate to each other and the wider society.

To accomplish this, I draw on literature on political society and relational dynamics in informal settlements, patronage as a particularly important relational form in South Asian cities, relational structures and social networks of people living in informal settlements, and collective action in the context of informal settlements. I point to some gaps in these literatures to point out areas where my research is able to make empirical contributions.

Chapter 3 then articulates my methodological approach to the research. I explain that the generative approach to the research requires separate, but integrated inquiry into the relational dynamics, patronage, relational structures, and collective action patterns in the informal settlements. For each of these, I outline the methods chosen tailored to the specific inquiry stream. Then I explain how each of the streams integrates into each other stream to provide a holistic set of insights for how agency is both constrained and facilitated by aspects of the complex social system in which the participants live.

Chapter 4 explores the relational dynamics in detail. I draw from my own reflections and observations to depict everyday life and politics in each of the settlements. According to the participatory ethic of the research, I was able to do this through intentionally building genuine relationships with the participants. I point out that much of what I witnessed is consistent with the political society literature, but rather than ending the inquiry there, that is where my inquiry begins. I start with the observation that people in these settlements behave according to relational patterns consistent with political society. Then I show how this structured the intervention by PRIA and Chetna to form *basti vikas samitis* (slum improvement committees, or SICs) in each settlement. Then I provide evidence on how the intervention shifted the relational dynamics and how the shift impacted agency.

Chapter 5 explores the particular relational dynamic/structure of patronage. Challenging the literature that would have us condemn patronage outright as a form that

perpetuates inequalities, I show that patronage as a ‘form’ can be experienced as either good or bad. I further distinguish between local ‘fixers’ and elected representative patrons. While not the only types of patronage relationships, these were two of the most important manifestations of patronage for the participants of this project. I present evidence that both of these manifestations of patronage have been misunderstood in the literature. ‘Fixers’ have often been condemned as self-interested and exploitative, but I show the importance of considering the contingent nature of their practice. I present detailed pictures of three ‘fixers’, depicting them as complex characters navigating a treacherous power landscape with genuine desires to bring good to their communities. I also present evidence of an important relational pattern observed between residents of informal settlements and their local elected representatives that may explain some of the variation in collective agency across settlements.

Chapter 6 explores the relational structures of people living in the seven participating informal settlements. Using data gathered through a simple survey about social connections, I present the social networks of the people living in the participating settlements. Crucially, I show how the intervention to form the SICs restructured the social network and what the impact of that was on agency. Making use of the concept of percolation from the complex networks literature, I show that forming the SICs helped create a ‘phase change’ in the participants’ social networks that significantly strengthened agency, helped create a new organizational entity, and created possibilities for new forms of engagement and collective action for the participants. Further, I show how all of this was done in a participatory way so that the technical social network analysis was made accessible and useful to the participants as they planned iterative actions within the SCSVUP project.

Chapter 7 explores some aspects of collective action for the project participants. I examine two major public events hosted by the participants in collaboration with PRIA and Chetna as part of the SCSVUP project as a means of exploring how the organizing project impacted the participants’ capacities for collective action. As mentioned above, this project was meant to broadly follow the Indian Alliance approach to organizing. In this chapter, I explore the organizing practice followed within the project, including the role I played as an organizer, to understand the impact such an approach had on participant agency.

Chapter 8, then, synthesizes the findings from chapters 4 through 7, providing a holistic understanding of the systemic nature of agency and social change processes. In

this chapter, I also comment on the extent to which the various methods chosen for the inquiry streams were compatible. Finally, I offer concluding thoughts on this project. After more than two years of the SCSVUP project, including a full year of my involvement, this thesis offers tangible evidence – both quantitative and qualitative – of change. Namely, this research has produced a body of evidence that agency was strengthened for the participants, with those having less prior leadership experience finding this project particularly transformative⁵.

1.4. Conclusion

I think we are in a time of great change around how information and knowledge are valued and used within society. A generation ago, a student like me would have spent hours tracking down an important book or journal article. Instead, the books and journal articles are almost always available to me instantly through the Internet. Throughout my PhD, my problem was not that the information was scarce, but that there was too much to sort through. Google Scholar allows a researcher to easily find thousands of resources on any subject, but it doesn't tell you which ones are important, which ones are valid, which ones are respected, or which ones your examiner will expect you to have read.

Today it is almost an absurdity to imagine myself as a lone researcher producing knowledge that can be exported and given out to the world, put on the bookshelf as an addition to the collective knowledge of mankind. To know something about human society, and especially to know something about changing human society, must mean creating that knowledge in partnership with others. Further, it would be an absurdity to think that researchers produce knowledge while subjects don't. In my research I don't talk about subjects, but partners and participants. In conducting and writing up this

⁵ In this thesis I use the terms transformation and transformative to refer to changes in participants' skill sets, capacities, and subjective sense of self. This term particularly connotes psychological changes around sense of efficacy, agency, and connectedness. While transformation is not always necessarily improvement, the term typically connotes a positive change. It is related to strengthened agency in that a stronger sense of self- (or collective) efficacy or sense of agency is related to stronger agency as demonstrated through action.

research, I have endeavoured to value the lived experiences of my research partners. It is my hope that through this thesis, they may teach others as they have taught me.

However, I don't think anyone knows how to fix the problems of urban poverty. We must learn how to do that by trying to do it. And, while my research partners had a great deal of first-hand knowledge of urban poverty, it is my hope that together we learned a little bit more – a little bit about how things might be better. One thing that has been confirmed by this research is that while we had a lot of knowledge, we did not have the resource of relationships with each other. It is my sense that, while this thesis is primarily about knowledge (co-)created through this research project, the relationships and institutional structures we created matter as much or more.

That is perhaps the central finding of this thesis: to strengthen the agency of people living in informal settlements, genuine relationships must be built and maintained that can catalyse and sustain that stronger agency. There is nothing new about suggesting new relationships are key for strengthening agency, but the evidence in this thesis proposes how such genuine and impactful relationships may be built.

By closely examining how and why people tend to adopt political society behavioural repertoires, I show how systemic social conditions have constrained agency. Political society repertoires represent the front lines of the co-evolution between those constraints and agency. People living in informal settlements are not passive victims. Their everyday lives are a constant struggle against systemic constraints such that their relational dynamics continually evolve so as to maximize their provisional agency. In this way, people living in informal settlements are already primed for social change action. Any intervention seeking to strengthen agency must recognize prevailing relational patterns as an important starting point – namely that the skills and experiences of political society are resources for developing a new, more advantageous dynamic.

This is perhaps most true when considering mediating relationships. Attention has rightly been called to mediation by the political society literature (Harrison, 2012; Madon and Sahay, 2002; Spiro et al., 2013) as well as literature from other perspectives (Von Lieres and Piper, 2014). Life in informal settlements, especially access to resources, is mediated by a range of actors including elected representatives, politicians, patrons, local-level 'fixers', and NGOs. While all these actors play a mediating role, each does so differently. In the experiences of this project, I identified 4 distinct configurations of patronage relationship between residents of informal settlements and

their elected representatives. Each configuration had a distinct relational dynamic which limited residents' agency and was self-perpetuating. By applying a complex systems lens, I point out how these systemic constraints can be resilient in the face of change action. I also suggest lessons for breaking those feedback pathways to shift into more advantageous configurations.

Local 'fixers', on the other hand, function in quite a different way. Rather than structurally being intertwined with the state, 'fixers' tend to be members of the settlement community. In the experiences of this project, local 'fixers' appear as a diverse set of actors that all balance their own personal interests with the interests of their communities. Far from being instrumental or exploitative, the 'fixers' in this study were complicated but genuine leaders working earnestly for the betterment of their communities. I find little room for either the cynicism or blind optimism of existing literature about the role of such 'fixers' in empowerment projects. I find that, first and foremost, 'fixers' are local leaders. They must be understood as individuals with particular sets of self-interest that may or may not align with the interests of any given project. This is only possible through genuine relationships, which implies that empowerment projects that fail to make allowance for such relationships will not be prepared to assess the costs or benefits of working with a particular 'fixer'.

It was also the experience of this project that the NGO partners changed their understanding of their role as mediator over time. Initially, PRIA and Chetna saw themselves as a bridge between people living in informal settlements and the actors meant to be providing services to them. Project documents and discussions with staff indicate that they envisioned their role as brokering a rather straightforward interaction, primarily as a source of information: providing information about government schemes to the participants and channelling the voices of the participants to the service providers. However, through developing genuine relationships with the participants and entering the messy realities of policy implementation, the mediating role shifted to one of organizing partner. That is essentially what the Indian Alliance model of organizing entails: NGOs being partners with self-organized residents from informal settlements, helping them facilitate organizing activities, develop new skills, and connect with service providers in new ways through new platforms.

Literature exists which tells the story of the Indian Alliance (SPARC as the NGO partner and NSDF/Mahila Milan as the settlement-based partners). However, it is not clear how the NGO partners and the settlement-based partners built their enduring

relationships or overcame the challenges to doing so. I find that acting as a genuine partner to settlement residents is a challenge for NGOs, which face their own constraints of funding and project cycles. Though SPARC was one of the institutional convenors of this project, PRIA was ultimately not able to establish such an enduring Indian Alliance-style partnership with the SICs in this project. This thesis is, however, able to offer suggestions about possible pathways for doing so.

Chapter 2 - Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

The main question taken up in this thesis is ‘How can the agency of people living in informal settlements be strengthened through efforts to build new relationships and new relational dynamics?’ Agency is the fundamental concept with which I explore complex change processes in the context of informal settlements in Raipur, a small but growing city in India of over 1 million people. After outlining the concept of agency, I introduce concepts from complex systems science, which will be useful for making sense of social change processes. ‘Generative structuralism’ is the practice of making sense of complex systems and their emergent properties by demonstrating the mechanisms at work. In the usual case, this means creating a (usually computational) model of system structures, agents, and interaction rules in order to demonstrate how their interactions generate the emergent features of interest. While I do not propose computational models, I make use of the ‘generative’ idea. I focus my analysis of agency in the context of an urban complex social system on the nature of the actors, the system structures, and interaction rules. In this way, I capture some of the complexity of social systems that impacts agency for people living in informal settlements.

I use the generative approach as a heuristic. That is, rather than building a computational model that reduces the actors to minimal characteristics and mathematically describes their interactions, I create a model with more ‘thick description’ of actors. But I still try to build an explanation of social outcomes through examination of relational patterns – the relationships that exist between people and the interactions that take place through those relationships.

In this way, I define relational structures as the relationships that exist between actors. I take this to include interpersonal relationships of all kinds as well as relationships between organisations (including the relationships individuals have with organisations and collectives). Even as I discuss the historical process through which this generative approach came out of various schools of sociological structuralism, I do not use relational structures to mean the same thing that those schools of thought meant

by ‘social structures’ – which, for them included things like institutions and social norms. For me, social norms are part of the relational dynamics.

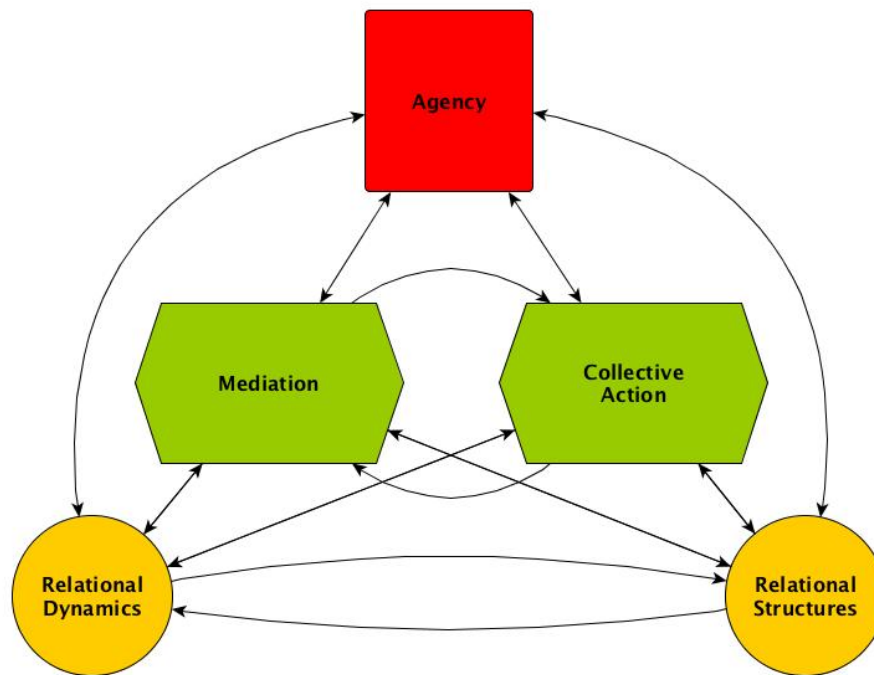
I define relational dynamics to be all the things that happen through relationships. This would include everything from words spoken by one person to another to patterns of interactions whereby certain groups of people come to adopt an identity. In my analysis for this thesis, I focus on how the participants tended to interact with each other and with other groups (such as the NGO partners, their elected representatives, and other powerful people).

Since this generative approach is a heuristic approach, I do not seek to explain everything that I observed through reference to the most basic relational structures and dynamics. I argue that relational structures and relational dynamics, being fundamental features of complex systems, already co-exist as they co-constitute the existence and functioning of a system.

When I look at the social world of the participants, there are already aspects of the system which have emerged as relational structures and relational dynamics co-evolved to lead to the present reality. In this way, I argue that mediation and collective action are relational structure-dynamic hybrids that have already emerged. It is a minor theoretical point, but it merits being explicit. I do not see mediation and collective action as fundamental features of the system in the same way as relational structures and dynamics. For this reason, they are depicted as hybrid emergent parts of the system within figure 1 (and later in figure 17).

I have structured the empirical chapters of this thesis to investigate each of these systemic aspects in turn. Figure 1 depicts this ‘generative’ approach to understanding agency, and it correlates to the outline of this thesis. Agency is the central concern of my research. In the complex systems context, I suggest that agency is impacted by the actors, the structure, and the interaction rules. In the first empirical chapter, I focus on the actors and their relational dynamics. In the second, I focus on one particularly important relational feature: patronage and mediation. In the third, I offer some innovative techniques to see relational structures (in the form of social networks) as they evolve over time. In the fourth, I consider how the actors, structures, and interaction rules changed over the course of my research, made manifest in the collective action that the participants were able to carry out. In each of the four chapters, I present evidence from before and after the SCSVUP project intervention to show how the system may have changed and agency may have been strengthened.

Figure 1 Social system properties and their impact on agency



Further, as figure 1 suggests, I posit that each of the systemic features impacts each of the others, leading to complex dynamics and complex pathways of causality. Firstly, relational dynamics – how people in the social system tend to interact – impacts agency directly. If something is simply ‘not done’, agency is constrained. Changing how things are done can make new things possible. But how things are done also impacts relational hierarchies and social positioning. For example, rag-pickers occupy positions of low status in India because of the work they do, and because of their low status, they are unable to find work outside of rag-picking. Similarly, things usually ‘get done’ in India through the use of some form of patronage relationship. The existence of patronage relationships impacts agency, but also constrains how people are able to interact with each other. It may not be possible to change patronage practice directly, but changing relational dynamics may shift how patronage operates. Further, the presence of patronage and its associated relational hierarchies can constrain the kinds of collective action people can take. In the typical ‘vote bank’ dynamic, residents of informal settlements are forced to act together as a bloc to get their patron elected. Thus forms of collective action that are possible impact agency, and agency could potentially be strengthened by devising alternative forms of collective action, changing how patronage relationships operate, building new relationships so as to change social structures, or changing the way people tend to relate to each other. In short, each of the

systemic features can impact agency directly, they can impact each other, and they can impact agency indirectly through their influence on each other. I argue in this thesis that the systemic nature of life in informal settlements has major implications for how agency can be strengthened. Particularly, each of these four systemic features provides a unique challenge to creating change, but also provides a unique entry point for intervention.

2.1. The main research question and inquiry streams

The main research question for this thesis is

‘How can the agency of people living in informal settlements be strengthened through efforts to build new relationships and new relational dynamics?’

Before embarking on my field research, I had articulated three main sub-questions, which I conceived of as being nested and ranging in scope from the local level actors, the changing social system containing those actors, and the wider domain of social science research. They were as follows:

- 1) How are local actors working for social change in Raipur?
- 2) How are social change processes shaped by the actors’ social networks, and how are social networks shaped by social change processes? and
- 3) How can a complex adaptive systems lens be operationalized for social science research?

Once I began my research, these questions changed slightly and took the form of a set of inquiry streams – processes of inquiry that included PRIA, Chetna, and neighbourhood groups involved in my research and sought to build evidence through various parts of the action research process. The following describes how the four inquiry streams emerged to address four main gaps in literature around the agency of people living in urban informal settlements.

In trying to understand social processes at work in the informal settlements, what people living there were like, and what they were already engaged in doing, I needed to investigate how people tended to interact, or

‘What are patterns of relational dynamics in informal settlements in Raipur?’

In other words, how does the way people tend to interact facilitate or constrain agency, and how does agency explain the way people tend to interact? In particular, I wanted to understand how the SCSVUP project intervention could work to shift those relational patterns to improve agency.

As described below, existing literature suggests that people living in informal settlements tend to exhibit several key relational patterns, usually described in terms of survival strategies, popular politics, and political society. To date, there have been very few empirical studies of informal settlements that have made use of political society as a conceptual lens to make sense of relational patterns. Of those, none have specifically attempted to apply a complex systems lens. If we accept that the key behaviours that fall under the description of political society reasonably describe dynamics in informal settlements, what insights can be gained about how to strengthen agency? Partha Chatterjee suggests that adoption of these behavioural patterns makes sense as an attempt to maximize agency within a highly constrained context. But he also points out that the political society ‘story’ never has a happy ending. These behaviours may forestall evictions or aid in survival, but they are not a solution in themselves to the problem of constrained agency. In this project, I explored how political society behaviours could be seen as a resource and inform interventions to strengthen agency.

On the way to exploring how social processes and structures operated in the Raipur context, it became clear that mediating relationships like those of patrons and local ‘fixers’ were important. Patronage has both a dynamic and a structural aspect. Thus the inquiry stream emerged to explore

‘What are patterns of mediation in informal settlements in Raipur?’

Specifically, how did particular actors like elected representatives, local leaders, and NGOs mediate social and political life for people in informal settlements? In particular, I wanted to understand how mediation facilitated or constrained agency as well as how insights into mediation could inform interventions to strengthen agency. I also found it particularly important to question the role NGO partners and academic researchers could play in mediating efforts to strengthen agency.

As I explain in greater detail below, mediation has been examined in the literature using several different conceptual lenses. Looking at the problem of disempowerment of people living in informal settlements, patronage has been seen as a necessary evil that allows people to meet their basic needs at the expense of being able

to challenge large scale structures and inequality. Recent studies have suggested that starting with the normative assumption that unequal patronage relations are always undesirable misses important aspects of what patronage means for people on both sides of such hierarchies. But how can patronage be part of the solution? Further, to date, no such studies of patronage have applied a complex systems lens to understand patronage as part of wider social processes beyond the settlement.

Few studies have been able to provide ethnographic detail about what local ‘fixers’ do and what their role might be in strengthening agency for settlement residents. Further, while studies have examined the interface between residents of informal settlements and low-level representatives of the state and shown that local elected representatives are important, a deeper understanding of these patterns is needed in order to find ways of intervening to strengthen agency.

Next, I made use of the idea that social networks could provide an important insight into the social structures of the complex social system. I experimented with two innovative ways of getting information about

‘What are patterns of relational structures in informal settlements in Raipur?’

I saw that if a dynamic picture of the social networks of people living in informal settlements could be captured, it could provide insight into the extent to which they facilitated or constrained agency. It could also provide insight into existing levels of agency since the social networks could be seen as manifestations of the kinds of relationships available to residents.

Existing literature on the social networks of people living in informal settlements suggests that, in settlements, people tend to have dense ‘strong ties’ with their neighbours that can assist in day-to-day matters of survival, but they tend to be somewhat disconnected from more resource-rich parts of society by network ‘holes’, which are bridged by patrons and brokers. This is consistent with the political society literature as well. These relational structures can be seen as reflections of inequalities, but they also create structural inequalities as brokers gain individual power from their network position (consistent with patronage literature).

Given the methodological challenges of carrying out a social network analysis for actual groups of people living in informal settlements, very few studies exist that treat relational structures by collecting social network data and carrying out social network analysis on it. Further, a major critique of social network analysis is that it tends to focus on ‘snapshots’ in time, leading to only indirect exploration of network

dynamics. My research provides two powerful methodological innovations to make such an analysis possible, and not only possible, but meaningful and useful to the participants themselves. Further, I argue that capturing data on participants' social networks as they evolve over the course of an intervention can capture important aspects of complexity and help ensure that such interventions are effective in strengthening the agency of the participants.

Finally, my research took place in the context of the SCSVUP project, which was an action research project. Given the importance of action in this kind of research – as a manifestation of agency as well as a pathway to strengthening agency – my research explored

‘What are patterns of collective action in informal settlements?’

Existing literature suggests that people living in informal settlements tend to employ several key forms of collective action, including

- Contentious collective action such as protest and resistance (consistent with literature on political society), social movements, and insurgency
- Non-contentious collective action such as instrumentally acting as a ‘population’ to access state resources through governmentality (consistent with literature on political society), non-movements, and co-production of services with government.

Collective action is ultimately dependent on mediated relational dynamics and relational structures. Understanding collective action requires understanding how residents in informal settlements (specifically participants in the actions) relate to each other; how they understand themselves in their own context; how they understand their interests; and how they practice and develop processes of communicating, planning, negotiating, learning, and coordinating. Essentially, how do they engage in organizing? Further, what role can be played by NGO partners and academic researchers as organizers or organizing partners?

In this section, I have outlined the set of four inquiry streams that emerged in my pursuit of greater understanding about how agency can be strengthened. They correspond to the four features of complex social systems that I highlighted above as impacting agency in figure 1, and therefore, they also correspond to my four empirical chapters. As such, each stream also addresses a unique gap in the literature around its specific issue. In the following sections, I outline the key literature that informed my inquiries and my conceptual framework. Before getting to the literature and gaps in

literature which the four inquiry streams address, I provide a background on agency and complexity. Agency is the central concept of this thesis and merits a detailed foundation upon which to build the inquiry. Further, I argue that the context of social change in urban informal settlements is inherently complex and, therefore, requires specific methodological and analytical tools to adequately explore issues of agency. I provide a detailed primer on what complexity is, why it matters that this research context was complex, and how research can capture complexity effectively.

2.2. Agency

Mustafa Emirbayer and Anne Mische's (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) theoretical piece about agency shifted sociological thinking about this key concept and is one of the theoretical centrepieces of this thesis. Grounding their analysis in the sociological tradition of Parsons, Coleman, Bourdieu, and Giddens⁶, their theory of agency rigorously builds on accepted ideas about structure and agency but disaggregates the two concepts. They reconceptualise agency as 'an internally complex temporal dynamic' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 964) in its own right rather than as one part of a mutually determined partnership with structures. They argue that agency is an inherent part of one's humanity, and it is rooted in the human experience of time. It is fundamentally relational, even within a single individual (especially how an individual experiences and orients oneself around the past, present, and future actions and consequences of action).

They define agency as 'the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and alters those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p. 970). In opening the 'black box' of agency, they suggest three inter-related elements, which they call a 'chordal triad', since they understand the three elements to interpenetrate each other and depend mutually on each

⁶ For example, Parsons' (1968) agency as a black box of 'ends-means rationality' (p965), Bourdieu's 'habitus' (1990, 1977) of routinized behavioural patterns, Coleman's (1990) notion that action is always a complex phenomenon because of the systemic interlinkages of people at the macro (society) level, Giddens' (1984, 1979) social structures as 'virtual' rules and norms that are recursively activated through social dynamics.

other to varying degrees across contexts. The ‘iterational element’ attempts to capture something similar to Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’, the way people fall into patterns of behaviours based on experience, explaining things such as identity and institutions. The ‘projective element’ captures the creativity inherent in humanity and the possibilities for novel action in particular social contexts. The ‘practical-evaluative’ element captures the way people take into account a host of positive and normative factors when taking action as well as the way people are capable of estimating likelihoods of possible effects of action given a host of other uncertainties and contingencies.

Emirbayer and Mische attempt to point sociology in a new direction on agency by explicitly linking the sociological traditions of American structural functionalism (i.e. Parsons) with Continental structuralism. They argue that these traditions helped us understand how agency and structure interact, but they theorized them as too closely linked to examine agency as a useful concept in its own right (i.e. not overdetermined by structures). In making this argument, they point to agency as an inherently complex phenomenon, even within a single actor, with its multiple competing and interacting elements that account for temporal experience (i.e., learned behaviours from experience, creative imagination of new possibilities, and forming practical and normative judgments or expectations of effect based on multiple contingencies and possible outcomes).

Fararo and Butts (1999) follow a similar logic, recognizing the intertwined theoretical genealogies of American and Continental structuralisms in pushing sociology towards an ever more complex and systemic approach – towards what they call ‘generative structuralism’. Beyond agency, they point out that these theoretical traditions have fed into social network analysis, mathematical, and computational approaches to understanding social systems. This is the development Bill Hillier (2005) calls ‘social physics’ – the tendency to abstract and mathematize away from individuals to a more positivist science of human behaviour. Thus we have Joshua Epstein’s (2007) ‘generative social science’ that sees agent-based computational modelling as the most promising form of social inquiry because it ‘explains’ the emergence of complex structures by demonstrating the mechanisms that generate those structures via agent-to-agent interaction dynamics.

Emergence, as I explain below, is a key feature of complex systems whereby patterns form at one level of a system based on the interactions of the elements at more micro-levels of the system. This is sometimes described as the ‘whole’ being ‘more than

the sum of its parts', since emergent phenomena can often have properties quite different from those constituent parts and may arise in quite counterintuitive ways.

While I agree with David Byrne (2005) that such a 'social physics' approach to social complexity misses much of what is important in human value-laden meaning-making processes, I find the approach of attempting to capture complexity by explicitly determining and understanding the relevant characteristics of actors, their structural/spatial positioning, and the relevant interaction dynamics compelling. It offers a standard pathway for approaching systems by starting from their fundamental components and following them as they generate emergent properties.

In recent decades, agency theorists have significantly advanced understanding of agency on a number of fronts. In addition to Emirbayer and Mische's sociological front, neuroscientists, social psychologists, and civic and policy theorists have also advanced conceptions of agency. Great advancements have recently taken place in brain research, among them the new ability to probe some aspects of human consciousness (including the experience of agency) as they emerge from neural network activity. In particular research by Olaf Sporns (2011) as well as (Metcalf and Terrace, 2013; Seemann, 2011) offer insights into how taking action influences neurological development. This research suggests that, typical of many features of complex systems, social experience (being part of a group, taking collective action) is shaped by neurological development and at the same time reshapes neural networks in the brains of individuals. While this is beyond the scope of this thesis, it's worth noting the resonance around the importance of understanding agency for meaningful understandings of human experiences, and the importance of understanding agency as a distinctly complex phenomenon requiring new methods that can better account for that complexity.

I accept Emirbayer and Mische's treatise on agency as an invitation to further empirical research on agency in social science, freeing agency from its overdetermined relationship with structure, and allowing us to explore how individuals and collectives can take action so as to change structures – i.e. how can people work to create effective social change. This thesis is particularly about how that agency – namely the ability of people to take action to effectively create social change – can be strengthened. This thesis builds on these conceptual foundations of agency and takes them into research – not about what agency is or how people experience agency per se, but about how agency can be strengthened.

Moreover, this agency literature has generally come from the discipline of sociology. In development studies, the focus tends to be on concepts such as inequality (Heller and Evans, 2010; Mosse, 2010), citizenship (Gaventa and Tandon, 2010; Holston, 2009; Von Lieres and Piper, 2014), and poverty (Narayan, 2009; Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013). Agency has begun to feature more prominently in development literature through Amartya Sen's (1999) capabilities framework. Rao and Walton (2004b) expanded this to argue shifting development's focus from equality of opportunity to equality of agency, and Appadurai (2004) used it to argue development should see people as agents with the 'capacity to aspire'. This thesis contributes to the effort to incorporate and flesh out the conceptual power of agency in development scholarship.

2.2.1. Civic agency

Agency in the arena of social change is 'civic agency'. Civic agency is the ability of people to come together across differences to take effective public action (Bickart and Fowler, 2012; Boyte, 2012). This framework locates agency in the connections between people, in their collective being or associational life, not exclusively in the individual. The Civic Agency concept focuses on what people do through and with their connections; it does not exclusively see connections as resources.

Organizing (sometimes imprecisely called citizen mobilising) is the practice of deliberately building civic agency. Across the world, organizers from different schools of thought have been trying to refine techniques for building civic agency. Barack Obama, for example, was trained by and was associated with the Gamaliel Foundation when he worked with people in poor neighbourhoods in Chicago as an organizer (Boyte and Gordon, 2012). The Industrial Areas Foundation has built effective broad-based civic organizations in such cities as San Antonio, Baltimore, and New York, helping people change their cities and transform themselves from passive victims to productive public partners (Chambers and Cowan, 2006). Organizing has also been shown to be crucial to empowerment projects in the development context: among women in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Kuttab, 2010), throughout the Pathways of Women's Empowerment project (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010; Pathways, 2011), and as a way to strengthen democracy in a number of developing countries (Coelho and Von Lieres, 2010).

2.2.2. Power

In order to analyse agency, it is necessary to carefully engage with the closely related concept of power. As agency is essentially the capacity to act, power is the field of aggregate force relations which impede or catalyse that capacity to act. In this thesis I conceive of power as an emergent property of social systems. Namely, power is a field that emerges from the combination and interaction of force relations. To arrive at this conception, I highlight some aspects of the nature of power that have been articulated previously.

I draw on Lukes (1974) and Gaventa (2006, 2003) to recognize that power manifests itself in social relations in three key ways: power that makes you do what you did not want to do, power that keeps you from doing what you wanted to do, and power that makes you internalise the interests of others such that you fail to recognize your own ‘true’ interests. Following Gaventa (2003) and Digeser (1992), I then additionally draw on Foucault to recognize that power is systemic rather than a substance that can be possessed. Power is the emergent phenomenon (belonging to the social system) that is the combination and interaction of all relevant ‘force relations’ (Philp, 1983). Philp, in 1983, echoes the language of contemporary complex systems theorists in articulating his understanding of power according to Foucault:

Changes in the force relations, and these are endemic, produce shifts in the overall pattern of power, which can only resist changes insofar as sets of relations of force can be mobilized against them. Power refers to the ‘complex strategic situation’ – to the field of force. It does not constitute that field but is, rather, the effect of the patterns within that field. Because sets of relations of force feedback to condition their members and inhibit change, stable patterns can emerge. Power, then, is based on this field of relations of force (Philp, 1983, p. 34).

Foucault provocatively leaves undefined what constitutes a ‘force relation’, and I chose to use the term in its intuitive sense. Social force may be applied directly by an individual or indirectly by the arrangement of a system including a host of institutions, communities, states, world organizations, etc. Power may be the result of intentional or unintentional acts. Given its nature as an emergent ‘field’, power is always present and acts on every person and every interaction, though differentially.

In this way, power may facilitate action or constrain action. Foucault (1982, p. 789) explains that:

[The exercise of power] is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more

difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions acting upon other actions.

I extrapolate that, if the exercise of power is a set of actions acting upon other actions, then power as a 'field' is essentially a potential acting on other potentials. That is, just as an anvil hanging over my head by a thread contains potential energy (which may cause me to move out from under it in case the thread breaks, converting the potential energy into kinetic energy and crushing me), power may influence actions and possibilities for action with only the potential for action.

Because of this, I refer to a 'power landscape' in this thesis as a mental estimation of the arrangements of force relations and how power is likely to facilitate or constrain possibilities in any given situation for the actors involved. Typical of emergent properties of complex systems, power has some seemingly counterintuitive properties based on feedback dynamics. For example, it is both the result of action and a prerequisite for action.

It is implied in the above quote, and others have also made the point (Allen, 2002, p. 133; Borch, 2005, p. 158; Digeser, 1992, p. 980; Foucault, 1995, p. 194; Gaventa, 2003, p. 4), that power for Foucault can be creative and that it conditions subjectivity (coming to be a conscious human being with interests and a social identity). Agency, for Foucault, was then intimately linked to power, and we may think of agency as roughly whatever remains undetermined by the power which conditions subjectivity. Allen points out that Hannah Arendt made an analogous argument, conceiving of power as 'the result of action (specifically, collective action), [and] also, in turn, a condition for the possibility of action' (Allen, 2002, p. 138); that is a precondition for agency.

I draw further on Arendt (1998, pp. 204, 247) to recognize the natality – the creative potential – of power. For Arendt, power was necessary for one's full humanity, and was therefore an end in itself. I do not suggest that power is inherently good or bad, but that power is an important part of a social system that is inherently social, exists at the system level and impacts individuals and collectives, can facilitate or constrain possibilities, and can be created by action even as it is a prerequisite for action.

Further, the community organizing tradition in North America has articulated a conception of relational power that informs this thesis. I draw on Chambers and Cowan (2006) and the Industrial Areas Foundation to argue that since power is relational and is both a precondition and effect of action, there are certain social actions that can create

relational power. Namely, their strategy for building power is to intentionally build relationships through which people can take collective action and then to take intentional action that further strengthens the relationships. In this way a group of people can build relational power in order to pursue their collective interests. They lay out a practice for building relational power based on organizers who carry out one-to-one meetings with other people to discover areas of overlapping self-interests, who then form a network of leaders who can bring together resources and people to take collective action. They conceive of the relationship building as the building of power, not necessarily the particulars of the ‘issue of the day’. Rather, relational power built in this way has the potential to be applied to any number of issues over time, especially in a way of proactively building resources rather than reactively intervening at particular moments.

This conception of relational power as a system property underpins much of my treatment of agency. While focusing on agency, my research highlights some of the relational practices that people living in informal settlements use to remain attuned to changes in the power landscape. In seeking pathways to strengthened agency, my research engaged with the issue of how to build relational power by innovating new ways to see the system as it changed over the course of a series of actions.

2.3. Complexity

Recognition of agency as an inherently complex phenomenon requires an engagement with complexity itself, what it means for something to be complex, and what that then requires for analytical tools to be able to capture complexity. In the context of social change processes in urban social systems, complexity manifests itself as multiple interconnected issues surrounding poverty (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2004, p. 14) as well as the interconnections of relationships (the social network structures). In fact, Nick Crossley (2008, p. 268) defines complex social systems as ‘networks of collective action which manifest a degree of internal coordination and integration such that the behaviour of their individual members appears to be connected and orchestrated in some way’.

Complex systems share fundamental characteristics across a wide variety of circumstances, and analysing the world through the lens of complexity can illuminate things traditional research approaches miss. Writers have made the case that (a)

development is a complex adaptive systems process (Ramalingam, 2013; Ramalingam et al., 2009; Rihani, 2002); (b) cities are complex adaptive systems (Bettencourt and West, 2010; Bettencourt, 2013; Bettencourt et al., 2010, 2008); and (c) economic activities such as choosing or adapting a livelihood (Arthur, 1999; Kauffman, 1996), the resilience of poverty (Bowles et al., 2006), and the apparent stability of an always changing macro-economy (Arthur, 2009; Arthur et al., 1997) are all complex adaptive system processes. However, social change and development researchers have had a notoriously difficult time operationalising the framework of complexity in the field research context. My research demonstrates one pathway to operationalising complexity for development research.

The challenge is to move beyond a complexity framework as a metaphor for social system dynamics to a way of capturing complexity analytically. Using the language of complexity has become fashionable of late, but I have identified three particularly promising approaches to complexity that have the potential to move beyond metaphor: the Santa Fe Institute's tradition; systems thinkers including Danny Burns, David Byrne, and David Snowden; and a dialogical approach employed by the STEPS Centre. First I introduce some basic concepts from complex systems science, and then I explore these three approaches before articulating my own approach.

2.3.1. Basic concepts of complex systems

Here I introduce a number of key concepts related to complexity and explain their relevance to my research.

Complexity – Complexity is a nebulous concept that has to do with things being interconnected in a way that is not straightforward and may be impossible to accurately articulate. This is in contrast to merely complicated⁷ situations where the relationships between the parts can be known and described precisely (such as the workings of a clock). The reader may wish for a more precise definition, but this has proven elusive for complexity researchers across many disciplines, as has any articulation of a comprehensive Complexity Theory or Complexity Science (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). In

⁷ In common parlance, people often use 'complex' as interchangeable with 'complicated', as in 'I had to go through such a complex process to get my visa renewed'. Whenever I use the word 'complex' in this thesis, I intend the precise technical usage.

the context of social change research, complexity manifests itself as multiple actors and multiple activities all working together to create a perpetually changing social environment where precise causality cannot be determined (Burns et al., 2012).

System – A system is a set of elements that relate to each other in some way and around which a boundary can be drawn separating it from its environment (Luhmann, 1995). When the elements interact in a way that is difficult or impossible to specify, the system is likely to be a complex system. It is sometimes useful to make a distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ systems, which refer, roughly, to systems that exist in the real world and systems that exist as conceptual constructions (Checkland, 2000). In my research I take human social systems to be ‘hard’ complex systems and investigate them through action research methodologies involving co-constructed ‘soft’ systems of conceptual linkages.

Complex System – John Holland (2006) lists four major features of complex systems: parallelism (large numbers of agents interacting simultaneously), conditional action (where agents’ behaviours depend on the simultaneous behaviours of others, resulting in things like feedback), modularity (when ‘groups of rules... combine to act as “subroutines”’ for example when activists make use of shared repertoires of protest tactics or when police respond with common tactics like corralling or using pepper spray), and adaptation and evolution (when agents and strategies change over time through trial and error or random variation). From this definition, it is easy to see that human social systems are almost always complex systems, and this is a foundational principle for my research.

Attractor – Complex dynamical systems usually avoid equilibrium, but they may operate within relatively stable patterns of order. This term has a precise definition within the mathematics of dynamical systems (Weisstein, n.d.), but it can loosely be used to refer to the relatively stable patterns toward which systems tend to move. It has been used, for example, to describe a conflict situation that is resistant to negotiated settlement even though all parties may wish to stop the fighting (Coleman, 2011). This concept is helpful as a metaphor for understanding why social systems may be resilient to change or why lasting change requires whole system change.

Non-linear – Again, non-linear is a mathematical concept which can be usefully, though loosely, applied to social systems. Non-linear dynamics would not accurately be captured by a linear regression model, for example, though there are econometric techniques for capturing non-linearity. It is sometimes used to suggest that

the dynamics of a situation are non-deterministic or non-specifiable. Though this borders on misuse of the term, it is helpful as a way to talk about the fact that complex human social systems do often display dynamics which are impractical or impossible to specify exactly (Burns et al., 2012).

Emergence – Emergence is the idea that certain properties that exist at the whole-system level arise (often in a counterintuitive way) from the interactions of the system's elements (Epstein, 2007, p. 31). This is sometimes described as wholes being more than the sum of their parts. Urban settlement patterns and social norms are examples of emergent properties of human complex systems.

Network – A network is a way to conceptualize the connections between the elements of a system. The formalism of networks, involving representing elements as nodes and their connections as edges is based in graph theory mathematics (Barrat et al., 2008), which provides a number of analytical tools for understanding the structure of relationships among parts of a system. Social networks, then, use this formalism to articulate and analyse the structure of human relationships. Since human relationships usually exist in the context of complex social systems, social network analysis can allow us to address some aspects of social system complexity analytically.

2.3.2. The Santa Fe Institute Approach

The Santa Fe Institute was an early pioneer in finding analytical approaches to capture complexity. In this section, I examine two works by preeminent complex systems researchers affiliated with the Santa Fe Institute, and consider applications of their insights for self-organized communities working for social change. Joshua Epstein (2007) and John Miller and Scott Page (2007) have written books outlining the application of complex adaptive systems analysis to social science. The Santa Fe Institute houses researchers from a range of disciplines, but from the beginning, the Institute has prioritised an approach to research grounded in the hard sciences. As a result, their research on social science issues has emphasised computational approaches that allow social research to be made as objective as possible.

The computational approach to social science advocated by Epstein, Miller and Page, and others involves agent-based computational simulations. A variety of software from NetLogo to Matlab can be used to create agents (objects with agency that represent people, organizations, groups, ants, etc.), situate them in a context (on a 2-D grid, on a network, etc.), define the rules by which agents act and interact, and then run

simulations to see what happens when those agents do act and interact. By starting with descriptions of agents and rules by which they interact, we can look at micro-level conditions that lead to emergent macro-level structures. This need not have anything to do with the real world, but it is possible to use this approach to model emergent phenomena observed in the real world, and thereby offer an explanation.

This is what Epstein calls ‘generative social science’. He poses the question ‘How could the decentralized local interactions of heterogeneous autonomous agents generate the given regularity?’ To this he would offer an experiment: ‘Situate an initial population of autonomous heterogeneous agents in a relevant spatial environment; allow them to interact according to simple local rules, and thereby generate – or “grow” – the macroscopic regularity from the bottom up’ (Epstein, 2007, pp. 5–7).

In other words, when we see a regularity in a complex human social system – for example, the price of a good in the free market or a group collaborating to care for a common resource – one valid way of explaining it is to build a model of agents, not all alike, each acting on its own initiative, that reproduces that regularity. If we hypothesize that a certain interaction dynamic is responsible for the macrostructure – that, say, tit-for-tat reciprocity rules may explain cooperation – we can start with agents that interact with those dynamics, and if we repeatedly show that the macrostructure is a robust result, we have put forward a legitimate candidate explanation (Epstein, 2007, p. 9).

One of the hallmark elements of complex adaptive systems is self-organization. Self-organization refers to the process of pattern formation in a system that occurs because of the interactions of the components (Camazine, 2006). An example is segregation among residents of a city because of the marginal preferences of diverse city residents (Miller and Page, 2007, pp. 143–146).

Beyond self-organized structures, complex adaptive systems also tend to display self-organized critical behaviour. Because of the way components of the system interact with each other, they tend to reach a point that is barely stable (Bak et al., 1987). This point is not a firm equilibrium, but it is minimally stable so that if perturbed, the system will move back into a similar state. Another way to say this is that there is an ‘attractor’ such that the system may start far from equilibrium and tend to move toward this minimally stable state. Perturbations to a system at self-organized criticality tend to send noise propagating through the system with scale-invariance. This is the so-called ‘power law’ behaviour (Bak et al., 1987).

The canonical illustration is the sand-pile model. Sand is dropped randomly on a table, eventually forming a pile that is minimally stable. As the system is perturbed by randomly dropping an additional grain of sand, avalanches are triggered whose sizes cannot be precisely determined in advance, but are distributed as a power-law function (Miller and Page, 2007, pp. 165–169). In other words, the avalanche size is not ‘normally’ distributed around a mean size. Instead the sizes will be distributed roughly as x^{-k} (Miller and Page, 2007, p. 165). So an avalanche of size 10 is 100 times less likely than an avalanche of size 1. Most will be small, but some will be very large. Further, very large avalanches will occur more frequently than what would be expected if avalanche size followed a normal distribution.

There are many interesting insights from this way of thinking about and researching human social behaviour in complex systems. However, because of the starting assumptions about what constitutes valuable social research, researchers in the Santa Fe tradition tend to limit themselves to particular social contexts that permit abstraction and objective examination. Only these contexts are conducive to computational modelling.

For example, researchers have computationally modelled racial segregation in an urban context. They discovered that overt racism is not necessary to explain segregation; it can emerge when a population has only moderate preferences for living near people like themselves (Fossett and Waren, 2005; Huang et al., 2014; Zhang, 2004). This is an important insight, but such models are only marginally capable of accounting for the social meaning that people attach to their lived experiences under such circumstances. Still, the ‘generative social science’ idea informs my approach to complexity in this thesis to the extent that it involves articulating as explicitly as possible the features of a system (the actors, the context, and the interaction rules) that are necessary to explain the emergent observations.

2.3.3. The Systems Thinking Approach

David Byrne refers to the Santa Fe approach to complexity research, perhaps unfairly, as ‘deterministic complexity’ (Byrne, 2001, 1998). In fact, agent-based computational models involve strategic use of randomness in modelling, though the role of random chance is completely prescribed up front in the model’s algorithms. Any model necessarily sacrifices accuracy for abstraction. I agree with Byrne’s assessment

that many questions that are crucial for social science research in complex contexts cannot be reduced in such a way.

Burns, Harvey, and Aragon (2012) present a way of looking at complexity in action research settings: ‘many situations in which action research facilitators and participants intervene are not straightforward, i.e. there are many actors and factors that influence the way change does or does not emerge over time, and these influences are themselves changing and unknowable in their totality.’ Within the non-linear dynamics of social systems, or when ‘outcomes result from multiple actions and interactions in ways that cannot easily be causally disaggregated, and outcomes may look quite different from what we would expect if we aggregated all of the individual actions that people take’ (Burns et al., 2012), they argue that action research is particularly useful for making sense of what’s going on.

One of the major learning goals of systemic action research is an ‘emergent’ understanding of the order of the system. Whereas other types of action research might focus on one group (perhaps disenfranchised workers or a minority group facing discrimination), systemic action research brings diverse actors together for multiple inquiry streams employing a multiplicity of methods to probe the dynamics of the entire system. Knowledge of the system is co-created through facilitated mapping exercises where insights from the different streams are integrated into a systemic understanding of how issues, people, and facts are interrelated (Burns, 2012, p. 95). This is not the result of linearly constructing an understanding from individual building blocks of information, but it is an emergent group knowledge that is, in some ways, greater than the sum of each participant’s knowledge. This is because connections are made that individuals would not have been able to make alone, and the knowledge comes to exist in forms (like maps) that are external to the participants, and no single one has a claim to the entirety. In this way, since action research itself mimics the behaviour of complex systems, it is a particularly useful approach to dealing with and understanding complex social systems. As I explain in chapter 3, much of my research design has been built around the facilitated group meaning-making processes that come from this systems thinking literature.

2.3.4. The Dialogical Approach

Scoones et al. (2007) argue, in their review of social science approaches based in complexity science and dynamical systems, that the biggest shortcoming of such

approaches is their failure to engage the political aspects of social systems. They propose a use of complexity as an analytical heuristic that is capable of a) accounting for the objective aspects of systems which can be analysed using techniques from the ‘hard’ complexity science traditions as well as b) accounting for the subjective aspects of systems that include normative assessments of social reality and subjective meaning-making processes, which must be analysed using techniques from ‘soft’ systems traditions (Scoones et al., 2007, pp. 35–6). For them, accounting for complexity in social science research must involve a recognition that, whatever the complexity of reality, meaning-making processes involved in social science research inevitably involve framings that differ based on the different perspectives different people bring to the research. A more complete and accurate assessment of complexity in social systems, then, requires a dialogue between a diversity of framings from a diversity of perspectives. I draw on this way of thinking about complexity in social science research in this thesis. As I explain in chapter 3, I have paired ‘objective’ analytical techniques for mapping and analysing complex social systems with iterated dialogical meaning-making exercises with the different participants to arrive at understandings of social change processes that mattered to the participants.

2.3.5. My use of complexity

In this thesis, I draw both on the trends in positivist social science as well as more dialogical and constructivist approaches to complexity. There are some aspects of complex social systems that are objective and lend themselves to capture and analysis by quantitative methods. In this thesis, I offer a way of seeing parts of the complex social system by recording the participants’ social networks over time. At the same time, I recognise that there are important aspects of complex social systems that do not lend themselves to object measurement or quantification. Specifically, agency depends on different participants’ subjective life experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their actions. This can only be accessed and analysed through narrative and through the facilitated analysis of the participants themselves.

Therefore, as I outline in chapter 3, I devised a way of coupling social network analysis with participatory action research so that technical analysis of complexity could be made accessible and meaningful to the participants and inform their efforts to create social change through collective action. I do not take the extreme position held by Epstein and much of the Santa Fe tradition that metaphorical uses of complexity are

invalid or that computational agent-based models are the only valid method to capture social complexity. I recognise the importance of the metaphorical use of complexity, though I use this thesis to push beyond the metaphor in the context of participatory action research.

2.4. Relational Dynamics

My research considers the dynamics of social change in the context of informal settlements (or slums) in Raipur. This is a context marked by multiple complex issues. One dominant feature of life in slums is poverty: exclusion from the formal sector, livelihood and housing insecurity, lack of services (like water, sanitation, police), and lack of formal or monetary assets (Meikle, 2002). Urban poverty cannot be seen as a straightforward and isolated phenomenon. It is inherently complex and an integral part of the city as a holistic urban ecology (Sampson and Morenoff, 2006). The structures of poverty exist as the enduring patterns that emerge from the interactions of people with each other and social institutions. Enduring poverty, then, the so-called ‘poverty trap’ (Bowles et al., 2006) can be thought of as an attractor state.

Addressing urban poverty, then, is not only a matter of providing resources, empowering people, educating, or silver bullet pro-poor policies implemented by benevolent technocrats. It also requires an inherently unpredictable process of whole system change embedded in a particular context. Crucially, it requires an extensive amount of local, particular knowledge of the system dynamics, including who the important players are, how they relate to each other, and the dynamics of power (de Wit and Berner, 2009). The workings of power within such social systems are of the utmost importance, and interventions that fail to account for them are destined for failure or worse (See Gaventa, 1982).

For these reasons, pro-poor interventions by outsiders aiming at empowerment or externally-driven social change, no matter how good the intentions, are unlikely to create sustainable change, and even less likely to create the desired sort of change. Sustainable change, then, must be driven by local actors. Locally-driven social change has the advantage of being both more likely to succeed and more ethical, as the people purported to benefit from interventions are actually the agents of change and have the leading voice in deciding what to change and how.

In Raipur, local social change activists from one informal settlement were already working to address their own issues when I began my research. They were engaging in action research, a systematic dialogue with civil society actors and government, along with PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia), an NGO based in Delhi, in an effort to ‘strengthen civil society voices on urban poverty’ (PRIA, 2011). In this effort, there was the recognition that there is something powerful in the connections between people (and between poor people and civil society institutions) that can aid poor people in pursuing their own advancement. This same notion has motivated the various traditions of Participatory Action Researchers (Freire, 2000; Horton and Freire, 1990), community organizers (Boyte, 2008; Chambers and Cowan, 2006), and social movement theorists (Davis et al., 2005; McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly and Tarrow, 2006). Various aspects of this phenomenon have been identified as social capital (Burt, 2000; Putnam, 2001; Sampson et al., 2005), collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000; Sampson et al., 1997), collective action (Ostrom, 2000), and cooperation (Axelrod, 2006, 1997; Ostrom, 1990).

All these ideas point to the notion that how people connect with each other – the topologies of their social networks along with the social dynamics on those networks – fundamentally shapes social reality and must be the focus of efforts to understand processes of social change. My thesis builds on this treatment of social relations and informal settlements to explore the functioning of those connections – how people relate to each other and the wider society as well as how those processes are shaped by and can reshape agency.

2.4.1. Political Society

Partha Chatterjee (2004) has famously elaborated a theory of political society to capture some unique aspects of agency for people living in urban informal settlements in the Indian context. While the concept has taken on a life of its own and has come to be used for a range of analytical purposes (Chatterjee, 2012), I find the most compelling aspect of the concept that it places emphasis on the particular patterns of social and political behaviours adopted by people living in informal settlements. As others have pointed out, South Asia is a political context marked by patronage (Chandra, 2004a; Mines and Gourishankar, 1990; Wilkinson, 2014), and Chatterjee argues that whereas people living in poverty and informal settlements might previously have relied predominantly on landowners or other powerful patrons, now it is common for such

people to instrumentally use the ‘population’-based technologies of governmentality to a) tentatively identify with a collective to make themselves visible to government, b) appeal to the service provision function of the state to access services via those populations rather than appealing to guaranteed rights associated with citizenship.

This entails particular forms of politics. People mobilise as ‘populations’ to appeal to government for exceptional treatment rather than equal treatment. In the case of illegal squatter settlements, residents may appeal for continued occupancy or housing rights, not by arguing the legality of their actions, but the morality of them. This also often coincides with a ‘vote bank’ dynamic where an entire settlement will (at least portray itself) as voting collectively as a bloc for their patron-politician (Björkman, 2014a, 2014b; Cendales, 2012; Chandra, 2007, 2004b; Engineer, 1995). The Indian constitution is meant to provide equal citizenship to all Indians, but it is generally acknowledged that Indians experience differentiated citizenship. If the wealthy regularly skirt legal regulations, political society argues that analogous exceptions should be granted to people too disenfranchised to escape informality.

Several authors draw attention to the fact that precise ideological or theoretical differences between political society and the rest of society are hard to pin down. We could say it coincides with residence in a ‘slum’, though not all disenfranchised people live in slums (or on the street itself). And what merits the application of the ‘slum’ label is negotiated instrumentally both by advocates and opponents (Björkman, 2014a). We could say it coincides with informality, though the wealthy employ informal means (for example building housing developments on publically owned land) without the same pejorative connotations (Roy, 2005). Rather, political society is something like a metonym, whereby people tentatively adopt an identity as a collective based on some attribute (i.e. ‘poor’ or ‘slum-dweller’) for the purpose of accessing services targeted to populations with that attribute (Roy, 2011; Spivak, 2005).

What I find most useful is to outline the behavioural dynamics that are captured by the concept of political society and to make use of it as an analytical heuristic in understanding some of the ways people living in informal settlements express their agency. The archetypical behaviours include:

- strategic identification with a collective to act as a population for the purposes of accessing population-based targeted government services (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 40)

- taking action to imbue that population-collective with the moral attributes of community (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 57)
- enumeration and/or self-enumeration as the basis for legibility, visibility, and legitimacy from the state and wider society (Routray, 2014)
- claims-making through appeal to ‘paralegal’ exception based on moral authority rather than legally guaranteed rights (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 40)
- strategic management of (political) relationships via direct or brokered connections to powerful actors so as to negotiate political exigencies in their favour
 - o strategic use of their (collective) votes to assist in managing those political relationships – i.e. ‘vote-banking’ (Björkman, 2014b; Chatterjee, 2004, p. 41; Engineer, 1995)
 - o frequent reliance on formal or informal representatives, mediators, or brokers to negotiate those relationships and to navigate the demands of government policy (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 73)
- use of collective action (sometimes contentious actions such as protests or militant resistance, but sometimes cooperative actions such as female ‘pavement dwellers’ taking down their own huts when police came to evict them (Mitlin and Patel, 2014)) to ‘mobilize support to influence the implementation of governmental policy in their favour’ (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 60).

Tom Harrison (2012), drawing from Corbridge (2005), argues that, rather than thinking of political society as a separate domain of society apart from ‘civil society’, they are ‘not so much separate worlds as overlapping norms and strategies’. Recently, researchers have begun to focus on those norms and strategies and to make use of the concept of political society as an analytical tool for social research. Routray (2014) tested the concept as a framing for ethnographic inquiry into settlement demolitions in Delhi.

The major critiques of political society have been around the potential of using it as a basis for ‘emancipation’, overly essentialising the cultural differences between the ‘subaltern’ and others or between political society and civil society, or as a normative ‘valorization’ of practices of illegality which may ultimately reinforce entrenched inequalities rather than challenging them. For the purposes of this thesis, I follow in the footsteps of Routray (2014) and others to simply make use of the concept to make sense

of the otherwise murky relational dynamics that characterise the context of my research site.

Rather than engaging with these debates around the concept, I make use of political society as an analytical lens. For example, I engage with questions such as if political society is an expression of popular agency via certain practices of popular politics, how can that agency be strengthened? How can NGOs and academic researchers more effectively partner with political society actors? Do such partnerships necessarily reify the technologies of governmentality that perpetuate inequalities, or can relationships be formed that move beyond accessing services or even co-producing services? Aside from ‘vote-banking’, what forms of collective action do political society actors use to assert their agency? Can new more effective forms of collective action be devised that build on but move beyond paradigmatic political society actions to strengthen agency?

2.5. Mediation and patronage

Chatterjee recognizes that political society tends to be mediated, and that these arrangements are unlikely to lead to more equitable outcomes, but he has not yet interrogated whether or how patronage works differently under conditions of political society than previously in the Indian and South Asian context.

Much of the patronage literature describes local elites, ‘fixers’, and other types of local level patrons that sometimes have deleterious effects on residents of informal settlements (see (Berenschot, 2011; Cendales, 2012; de Wit and Berner, 2009; Manor, 2000; Montgomery, 2007; Piliavsky, 2014a; Platteau, 1995; Reddy and Haragopal, 1985)). However, this literature fails to sufficiently explain the variation in types of mediating relationships at the level of the settlement. In fact, some actors may not be seen as ‘patrons’ at all, but opportunists exploiting the vulnerabilities of people living in informal settlements. Not only must people living in informal settlements negotiate unequal relationships of patronage to ensure their daily survival, they also must fend off predators who would profit from their lack of political or economic power. This social vulnerability goes beyond the better-understood vulnerabilities around access to adequate nutrition, clean water, sanitation, and health care. In this way, social vulnerability further constrains agency by taxing the time and energy of residents that could otherwise be spent pursuing their own development agendas.

De Wit and Berner (2009) considered patronage forms in the context of grassroots empowerment projects in three cities in India. They examine processes of elite capture in these projects and question whether it is possible to craft a programmatic intervention that avoids reinforcing patronage structures and the inequalities associated with them. They contrast their observations with those of Manor (2000) in his classic study of ‘small time political fixers’ in India. Against his ‘almost romantic notion of rural intermediaries who supposedly genuinely seek to serve the people and support the democratic process’, they cynically claim that fixers are ‘rather local political entrepreneurs, balancing the need to make money with the need to remain popular, reliable and well-connected... the fixers’ role is critical precisely in conditions where people are extremely poor and inequalities severe’ (de Wit and Berner, 2009, p. 933). Nevertheless, both studies depict a complex reality of what Jauregui (2014) calls ‘provisional agency’ where people take actions that balance competing interests for doing good public work and advancing their personal interests. The literature is clear that patronage structures in this context are not ‘black and white’, but few detailed studies of fixers have been done to look for patterns that might help explain when and how local ‘fixers’ can help improve agency (either individually or collectively) in informal settlements.

Piliavsky (2014b) argues that in the South Asian context, the study of patronage peaked in the so-called *jajman* studies period of ‘positive village ethnographies’ around the 1970s. Anthropologists noticed patterns of a system of relations between rulers/governors and the ruled/governed that seemed to be both ubiquitous and timeless across ‘village India’. However, according to Piliavsky, that rather simple picture of patronage was complicated by further study to the point that there was no longer thought to be one system of patronage across India, and the important insights into the relational principles that underpin patronage dynamics were discarded as well.

Piliavsky argues that Western academics tend to bring strong moral predispositions to their inquiries into politics in South Asia about the existence of inequalities and the nature of human beings as ‘uniquely different’ individuals each bearing absolute rights. For her, these predispositions make it difficult to accept the indigenous framing of patronage as intensely moral without being inherently bad or distorting of functioning democracy. Rather, patronage, as experienced by local people on either side of the hierarchies, is a ‘mode’ of relating that may be either good or bad, depending on how people relate to each other. Without essentialising the cultural

aspects of traditional patronage structures, she suggests that establishing ‘good’ patronage relations may be more desirable for people involved than ‘impartial’ public structures. Partiality, she suggests (2014b, p. 20), is the opposite of indifference, meaning that access and obligations are not static, predefined, or objective. They are inherently relational, and thus to function, they must not be impartial. Access to resources and obligations of leaders to constituents must then be dependent on the particular relationships in place – the ‘exchanges, obligations and bonds among real people who are by no means indifferent to one another’, and this is what makes society work.

I do not read Piliavsky or the other authors in the volume (Piliavsky, 2014a) to be advocating for patronage structures as desirable outcomes, and I do not intend to employ the concept that way. Rather, patronage functions in local vernacular forms that serve important functions – some of which might even be used to work towards social change. If we begin with the goal of undermining or removing patronage relations as inherently oppressive, then we are insisting that a fundamental feature of how social systems work in this context be changed before desirable outcomes can be attained.

By complicating patronage, we can scrutinize it in greater detail to see if there are important patterns about how patronage works when, where, and why. For example, de Wit and Berner highlight the fact that local ‘fixers’ have an incentive to maintain their position of relative power by acting as broker between the poor and powerful actors such as politicians or political party operatives. But as Berenschot (2011) argues, few studies have been done about fixers. How can we assert that all fixers behave as ‘rational actors’ according to the incentive structures in place? How do fixers understand themselves as public actors and potential change agents? When and where might they see themselves as leaders and agents of development, and how might they more effectively benefit their communities in cases where that is what they see themselves to be doing? In current literature, little distinction is made between ‘fixers’ in the pejorative and local leaders.

And what is the relationship between local level ‘fixers’ and other structures of patronage at work in the context of informal settlements? If the locally elected representative has become the face of the ‘everyday state’, and the dynamics between local people and their elected representatives has come to be characterized by the dynamics of political society, how does the particular existence and functioning of ‘fixer’ relationships intersect with the functioning of political society relations vis-a-vis

parties? This again directs our attention to the practices of local level organizing. What is the role of the ‘fixer’ in community organizing? Are such political actors fundamentally unfit to participate in the kinds of community based organizations characteristic of interventions by organizations like SPARC and PRIA?

Further, while many researchers have examined how patronage works in a nuanced way, recognizing that patronage is a common means and strategy employed by people living in urban poverty (Auyero, 2001; Auyero et al., 2009; Berenschot, 2015), I have not found any attempts to consider how patronage relations might be intentionally engaged or altered in such a way as to strengthen agency. Rather, as Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2013, p. 192) argue, patronage structures may be a ‘valid’ way in which the poor survive, but the structures themselves require the persistence of inequalities. This is clearly a feedback process and points to the systemic nature of social relations including patronage relations.

Mitlin and Patel (2014) argue that the answer is to create alternative relations. This is clearly a step in the right direction, but how can that change existing patronage structures (and/or patronage dynamics) in such a way as to strengthen agency? This thesis takes the challenge to create alternative relations as a testable assumption. This will require specifically seeing patronage relations as a complex systems dynamic in ways much of this literature points to, but lacks the analytical tools to address. As noted in figure 1, this thesis takes mediation to be an already emergent feature of the social system as it is, stemming from the interplay between relational structures and relational dynamics.

2.6. Relational Structures

As many scholars have noted (Brand, 2010; Perlman, 1976; Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013), informal settlements often seem chaotic but are actually effective at using available resources, and people who live in them generally make continuous improvements to their infrastructure, all without formal claim to the land and with the constant threat of eviction. In fact, research on the social networks of the urban poor suggests that poor people tend to live in densely populated neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty, they tend to have dense ties of mutual assistance and mutual dependence with each other, and they tend to maintain important ‘weak’ ties or vertical ties of patronage to important people outside the neighbourhood (Burt, 2000; Cattell,

2001; Granovetter, 1983; Portes, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). De Wit and Berner (2009) point out that the urban poor may be reluctant to engage in activism or social movements since they have limited time and energy beyond what is necessary for getting by, and either find it preferable or unavoidable to depend on well-placed patrons. Abilities to act collectively may be constrained by this system, which simultaneously benefits the patrons – politicians or other local elites (de Wit and Berner, 2009, p. 930). Understanding these relationships – i.e. how the poor connect with the wider system – especially how they variously constrain or facilitate collective action is crucial to understanding the agency of the urban poor.

Patronage, discussed above, is as much a relational structure as it is a relational dynamic. Considering its structural features, Ronald Burt (2000) uses the concept of network ‘holes and closure’ to suggest that patronage results when a group in relative isolation is connected by a bridging actor to the wider network, resulting in greater power or advantage for the bridge actor due to his or her position in the social network. But patronage relationships are a puzzle. According to some (see Chatterjee (1998) and Berner and Phillips (2005)) patronage is simply the unavoidable way the world of informal settlements works, the inevitable structure that arises in situations of deprivation and limited access to scarce resources. But this structure seems to work for some communities while it is detrimental to others (Narayan et al., 2009, pp. 129–30). Further, some communities successfully minimize the effects of patronage while others fail to (Jha et al., 2007). In my research, I gather social network data to investigate this puzzle of variation in relational structures and their impact on collective action for social change.

De Wit and Berner (2009) studied pro-poor policy interventions in three Indian cities, and showed that poor people living in informal settlements tend to exist in relationships of vertical patronage, where they are dependent on ‘slum leaders’ or ‘slum elites’ as well as other government and NGO actors for access to resources. In their study, outside NGO actors had hoped to make the policy process more participatory, but they were unable to overcome the dynamics of patronage, which, in their view reinforced inequalities. The authors conclude that local community-based organizations (CBOs) that seem to be grassroots-led organizations of the poor ‘inevitably reflect and reinforce local divisions, inequalities and power differentials, and elite capture of benefits is not the exception but the rule’ (de Wit and Berner, 2009, p. 944).

Studies like this show that local power relationships are key to successful ‘empowerment’ interventions. Outside interventions, by their very nature, deal in scarce resources – whether that is money, services, or merely access to their own civil society organization. There is simply not enough to go around, and this traps both the intervening organizations and the local poor in patronage relationships brokered by local elites.

Whether this ultimately precludes lasting social change or empowerment of poor people is a matter of debate. There is substantial variation in practices of patronage and slum leadership between different communities. Jha, Rao, and Woolcock (2007) conducted a study of Delhi slums with both qualitative and quantitative elements and found that the type of leadership structures and governance mechanisms that emerged within slums depended strongly on how long the slum had existed and how ethnically diverse it was. Older settlements tended to have more established structure, to operate according to traditional governance mechanisms (based on ethnic, tribal, class, or caste traditions), and to have leaders who facilitated direct access to resources and politicians. Newer settlements tended to be more chaotic, to have leaders emerge through non-traditional pathways who acted as intermediary between the settlement and outsiders, and to have less cohesion and capacity for collective action.

Further, De Wit and Berner recognized that urban poor people often have ‘dense webs of mutual support and risk-sharing, organized along lines of kinship, common origin and/or religion, or neighbourhood, and predominantly carried by women. Social cohesion and trust accumulated in these networks may become the basis of collective action at the communal level’ (2009, p. 942). They suggest that this is rare compared to the more patronage-based organizations, and that efforts to use such groups for the purpose of development or empowerment projects puts them at risk of collapse.

Burt (2007) refers to this phenomenon as network holes and closure. Many poor people rely on the resources of their social networks in order to survive. Close-knit communities benefit from being highly connected. Their closure provides safe space for trust, support, risk sharing, and collective identity, but it also prevents them from accessing resources in other networks, in some ways cutting them off from other parts of society. The few people among those communities with ties to the outside act as bridges. Because of the holes – that is because of the gaps between their communities and the wider society, these bridging agents gain significant influence.

However, Jha, Rao, and Woolcock (2007) suggest that the ability to form such dense ties depends on how well established the slum community is, how ethnically homogenous, and how well the residents have managed to act collectively within an emergent leadership structure capable of facilitating access to scarce resources. Patronage can sometimes develop as a defence mechanism through which the settlement fosters cohesion. Further, Jha et al. suggest that in some cases, when slum governance structures are well established, the residents are able to find ways of undermining the authority of the *pradhan* or leader.

Research in Angola shows that we should be careful about assuming dense ties among slum dwellers. There, decades of war destroyed community ties and drove people to the cities, where they settled in heterogeneous and new slums (Robson and Roque, 2001; Roque and Shankland, 2007). This apparently hindered the formation of dense social ties and precluded much capacity for collective action. In Indian slums, the nature of ties between slum dwellers, their leaders, and the outside world is likely to be contingent on a number of factors including how well-established the slum is, the homogeneity of its occupants, the leadership structures that have emerged, and the life histories of the occupants (have they come from a village nearby, other states, or from previously demolished slums).

Sampson et al. (2005) considered the effect of community structure on social capital in Chicago neighbourhoods. They use the concept of social capital to mean the benefit a person gets as a result of his or her connections to others, which is similar to my consideration of social networks. They refer to structure as the ‘networks’ of personal connections within the community as well as organizations and institutions. They argue that trust and shared expectations about tending the commons are more important than strong neighbourhood ties for increasing the chances of successful collective action. Further, they conclude that the density of non-profit organizations or community-based organizations (in the US context) predicts effective collective action better than rates of membership in civic organizations or having dense social ties. However, in their treatment of community structure, they fail to treat social networks analytically – that is, they consider social ties but do not collect social network data for rigorous analysis.

Other researchers do examine social networks analytically. Generally, though, this limits them to a rather simple conception of social capital and excludes qualitative features like agency and the kinds of collective behaviour Sampson et al. (2005) were

able to consider. Gargiulo and Benassi (2000) look at social networks within a computer firm and discover that managers with dense social networks (where they are connected to everybody) are less able to adapt to change than managers whose social networks have structural holes. Burt (2000) conducted a large scale analysis of the social networks of managers and concluded that three basic types of network structures affect social capital: clique networks are small and dense, lack social capital, and are associated with poor manager performance; broker networks are large, have structural holes, and allow social capital via connections across holes; and hierarchical networks are large, sparse, and have a central node so that outsiders gain access to social capital through the central node's brokerage network.

This is another way of articulating Granovetter's (1983) 'strength of weak ties'. It also ties in directly with the issue of complexity. Niklas Luhmann (1995, p. 24) argued that systems only became complex when it was no longer possible for every element to be connected simply and directly with each other element. This phenomenon of social capital being realized through network holes (places where, because of limited connective capacity, people are connected to other social networks via weak ties) must emerge from the *complexity* of the social system.

Social network analysis makes use of graph theory mathematics and statistics to illuminate structural features of networks like class (random, scale-free, small-world, etc.), centrality (a statistical measure of how many connections actors have), and clusters (groups of nodes more connected to each other than a larger group) (Wasserman and Faust, 2007). However, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) point out the gap between this analytical approach to social networks and the more conceptual treatment that some sociologists employ. In particular, the analytic approach struggles to incorporate beliefs, values, or civic agency. What is needed, then, is to pair a sophisticated analysis of evolving social networks with a qualitative investigation of what relational structures or relationships mean, how their changes over time are experienced by local people, and how interventions might try to target relational structures in such a way as to strengthen agency.

Social network data is usually a snapshot of one point in time. So, key questions about how those networks develop and change over time are not usually considered. Further, network dynamics – information, influence, or other things that flow through networks – are usually inferred indirectly from the network structure (Wasserman and Faust, 2007, p. 730). However, collecting social network data in the same place over

time would allow for an analysis of network restructuring dynamics. Further, if social network data is collected through the kind of participatory mapping techniques described below, which couple structural inquiry with questions about perceptions of power and influence, more social dynamics may be dealt with analytically. In my research, I innovated ways to do this – helping participants see the way their relational structures were changing in response to their organizing action and how that was impacting their agency.

2.6.1. Complex Networks and Evolving Social Networks as social change

Barrat et al. (2008, p. 47) point out that a network is simply the graph theoretic articulation of specific aspects of a system, including descriptions of the elements and their relational properties. Complex systems can be represented by complex networks, with particular analytical tools available to mathematically explore them. Often large amounts of data are collected about complex systems such as the Internet (Maslov et al., 2004) or interaction patterns of individual genes in cancer cells or protein interaction networks (Han et al., 2005). Computational tools can then be applied to search out structural patterns within the data that can make order out of something that seems chaotic (Boccaletti et al., 2006; Newman, 2003; Reichardt and Bornholdt, 2004).

Social network data is notoriously difficult to collect, especially in the context of an loosely bounded, nebulous space like a neighbourhood (Greenbaum and Greenbaum, 1985, p. 49; Hipp et al., 2013, p. 614). Older studies of urban social networks sampled neighbourhood residents randomly and simply asked them about their connections without any attempt to recreate or explicitly analyse the actual network – for example Greenbaum and Greenbaum (1985, p. 49) in whose study of neighbourhood relationships in 4 neighbourhoods of Kansas City ‘networks’ were merely a metaphor. More recent studies have abandoned data collection altogether. For example, Hipp et al. (2013) study the usefulness of network metrics in predicting crime by simply creating a simulated model network tuned according to census data. They explain their choice saying:

[A]ssessing many network properties of theoretical interest requires a census of all persons in the city, as well as the spatial distribution of all of their ties, and therefore typical sampling-based survey strategies are not appropriate. Clearly, this is impractical for researchers (Hipp et al., 2013, p. 614).

Still a number of scholars have outlined the care that must be taken when drawing meaning from social network metrics, and they offer a way of using them (carefully) with appropriate corrections for non-randomness of survey and the non-linear way missing data can disrupt estimates (Borgatti and Cross, 2003; Coulon, 2005; Sporns, 2011).

What most social network analysts caution against is using biased metrics in further econometric analyses (like regressions). If the error calculations for a metric are biased, the bias propagates unpredictably when brought into a regression to the point that significance calculations can become meaningless.

Borgatti and Cross (2003) point out some of the inherent uncertainties in using social network analysis in their study of information seeking behaviours in the context of organizational learning. Their main point is that while much can be gained from strictly metric social network analysis, much more can be gained from coupling it with a qualitative study to open the ‘black box’ of the node (Coulon, 2005).

Szwarcberg (2012) carried out a network analysis study in the same context as Auyero’s ethnographic work on the problem solving networks of political clientelism in Argentina. She found significant overlap between political problem-solving networks and other, non-political social networks (for example relationships through which people obtain child care). As Kivelä et al. (2014) note, real world social networks often consist of networks of networks, and network indicators often tell very different stories if those other ‘multi-layer’ networks are taken into account (Havlin et al., 2015).

Percolation is a particularly relevant phenomenon described by complex networks. It offers insight into how the dynamics of networks and the dynamics on networks work together. Percolation, as the name implies, refers to situations where there is sufficient connectivity between nodes for something to flow through the network.

For example, say we care about preventing a disease from spreading across a network. Given the structural features of the network, we can find out whether it is better to inoculate everyone, or to target specific people, or to quarantine (i.e. breaking links between nodes so that they cannot come into contact with one another). This model is analytically equivalent to a scenario where we care about ‘access to services’ which ‘flow’ through relationships from powerful actors to less powerful ones. How should we intervene to increase the flow of services?

Complex networks literature does not provide a one-size-fits-all set of solutions to such problems, but it does suggest options given the characteristics of the networks. This suggests that simply characterising real-world networks would go a long way to generating potential solutions to such a problem.

Percolation is an important way of thinking about dynamic complex networks because it is one of the simplest models that captures ‘phase change’ behaviour (Saber, 2015, p. 4). That is, starting with a set of disconnected nodes, if we systematically add connections, at some point (depending on the structural properties of the network and the processes by which we added the connections, i.e. randomly or non-randomly, but independent of social context) the network qualitatively changes from being a set of largely disconnected groups to a single, mostly connected group. This is a simple, but non-trivial example of emergence and critical behaviour in a complex social system. Recent research has been done on social implications of percolation effects in the context of human social systems (Solomon et al., 2000), but as of yet, no one has applied this lens to evolving networks of urban organizers. My thesis does this by looking at how new connections formed over the course of my research changed fundamental properties of how the system worked and evolved.

2.6.2. Networking for Social Change

Some of the community development literature has addressed the fact that complex systems science can inform social change action (Gilchrist, 2000). This literature suggests, based on largely qualitative research, that community development, self-help, and empowerment can be fostered by ‘networking’ – the strategic forming of new relationships. This is an excellent common-sense suggestion, fully backed up by the science of networks. However, these studies do not offer a way to go beyond common sense to guide the networking strategy.

Community organizers have also stressed the importance of relationships and strategically making connections across distance and difference to find areas of overlapping self-interest that can serve as the basis for collective action (Chambers and Cowan, 2006). As a community organizer, I was taught a technique for ‘power mapping’ that involved mapping out actors that had power relevant to whatever was the focus of organizing, along with everything that was known about those actors’ self-interests. We would then systematically reach out to those actors to explore building a

coalition. This was perhaps a rather sophisticated approach to building a coalition, but analytically, it did not go beyond a trivial analysis of relational structures.

Satterthwaite and Mitlin (2013, p. 192) also consider the problem of people living in urban poverty in informal settlements who tend to be dependent on fundamentally unequal patronage relationships. They suggest that the solution must lie in building alternative connections, presumably to somehow break the feedback loops that keep reinforcing the structures of inequality (as described above, patronage structures requires the perpetuation of inequalities, otherwise people have no incentive to allow parasitic mediation). However, what are the mechanisms by which ‘networking’ leads to social change? What is the impact of new connections on the agency of various actors? What should be taken into consideration when deciding on a networking strategy?

In order to address these questions, my research brings together these ideas from community development with concepts from social networks and complex networks literatures to strengthen analytical capacity to understand how and why certain networking activities can generate change.

2.7. Collective Action

Bandura (2000) set out one of the foundational treatises linking experience of taking action to experience of agency by making use of the psychological concept of efficacy: the belief and sense that one’s actions make a difference. True for both individuals and groups, the belief that doing something will make a difference provides incentives and motivation to take action in the first place. Bandura rejected any neat dualisms around structure and agency or self-interests and collective interests. Consistent with a complex systems view of social reality, Bandura argued that individual and collective agency, as well as social structures at multiple levels, are interdependent, mutually contingent, and mutually constitutive.

Cleaver (2007) took the idea of agency and collective action further with the concept of ‘skewed interdependence’ – the idea that mutuality/interdependence and domination/subordination coexist side by side and result in unequal, dynamic constraints on agency. She explains ‘Common interests are embedded in relations of unequal interdependence, often involving arrangements of patronage. For many poorer

and subordinate individuals and groups, access to resources is primarily exercised through inequitable social arrangements' (Cleaver, 2007, p. 234).

Agency is complex and involves ability to take action, ability for actions to have desired effects, ability to feel confident that one's actions will have the desired effects, the skilful negotiations of structural constraints, dynamic/behavioural constraints, constraints based on complex plural identities, ability to count on various proxies for proxy agency and/or proxy voice, and many more things. There is a feedback dynamic between agency and collective action – collective action can enhance agency at times and agency can enhance abilities for collective action.

Heckathorn (1996) uses a game theoretic approach to address this. He surveys the literature around collective action and finds that different theories actually apply to different 'games' – that is to different configurations of structures and dynamics such that collective action must solve different dilemmas. He proposes five basic collective action 'games', though these are not particularly relevant to this thesis. What is relevant is the notion that in order to solve problems of collective action, one can either work within the rules of the current 'game' (which might not work in your favour) or one can try to shift the dynamics into a new kind of 'game' that may be easier to win.

Recent research on social activism using social identity theory suggests that activists belonging to groups taking collective action tend to experience changes to their identities over the course of their experiences. This is clear evidence against rational actor models of understanding how people experience and make decisions about participating in organized social change action. As group-based values and goals emerge, individuals tend to experience a changing of their own perceived values and goals. The author uses the example of how insiders may come to define 'success' as standing firm against opposition or building a long-term movement that may not affect desired changes immediately. Outsiders, on the other hand, who have not experienced such a socialized transformation through participating in collective action, may put more weight on the prospects for immediate change when deciding whether to join in (Blackwood and Louis, 2012, p. 75). In this way, collective action can contribute to strengthened sense of agency for individuals and sense of empowerment that goes beyond the experience of participation itself (Blackwood and Louis, 2012, p. 76). For example, years later, a person may feel that having been a part of a particular movement shaped who they are and their sense of life purpose (see, for example, (Martínez et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 2012)).

The main implication for this research is that it provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for the notion that fostering group-based collective action can have important effects of transformation at both the individual and the group level – effects which are likely to outlast the action itself, the movement it may or may not be a part of, and even the nascent organization. This comes about because of the complex interlinkages between individual and group level processes during the collective action. Over the process of organizing and taking collective action, people come to see their individual interests in group terms and group interests in personal terms (Blackwood and Louis, 2012, pp. 86–7). Further, it provides an empirical backing for the notion (common to organizing practice) of not pre-supposing the political goals or definition of success for an organizing effort.

In my training as a community organizer, this manifested itself in the principle of focusing on building long-term relationships rather than mobilizing people around the ‘issue of the day’ (Chambers and Cowan, 2006). For example, Desai and Joshi (2014) studied collective action in the form of women’s self-help groups (SHGs) in India and found that women who participated were significantly more likely to make intra-household decisions and be involved in public civic activities even as they were not likely to have significantly higher incomes or socio-economic status.

Biekart and Fowler (2012) have put forward a very promising framework for incorporating agency into the context of development projects: the Civic Driven Change framework. The Civic Driven Change framework is based on four propositions which I apply to this thesis:

- Societies are political projects, the understanding of which demands consideration of power relations and the plurality of different actors (p470).
- Civic agency is a core (normative) concept via which situations are defined and judged within their historical and political context (p470).
- Social realities are viewed as failing to live up to a preferred, imagined reality ‘which creates dilemmas for collective action calling for the initiative, energy and agency of many’ (p471).
- Development is an inherently uncertain, complex, indeterminate process involving societal co-production for good or ill (p471).

The framework does not offer concrete prescriptions for development interventions as such, but it does require that a focus for such interventions must be the equality of political agency.

Sociologists, psychologists, and even neuroscientists have been struggling to come to terms with the linkages between taking (collective) action and strengthening agency for a long time. In this brief selection of promising thinking, I am led to the testable assumption that deliberately taking collective action (and deliberately building the capacities to take collective action) can be a pathway to strengthening civic agency beyond the context of the action. This strongly resonates with several organizing traditions – traditions that have honed the practice of intentionally building relational power for the purposes of reshaping society into closer alignment with the ‘preferred, imagined reality’. In this thesis, I specifically consider the organizing practices of the Indian Alliance and PRIA as potential catalysts for transformative collective action. Transformative collective action would be action that has the effect of changing one’s perceptions and experience of individual and collective value, efficacy, power, and agency.

Relational structures and dynamics as the foundation for collective action

As I depicted in figure 1, collective action is an emergent structure-dynamic feature of social systems. The ability to act collectively depends on the existence of relationships such that a collective exists as well as established patterns of behaviour so that actions can be coordinated. As a higher-level feature of social systems, collective action has the potential to leverage change efforts by scaling them up. That is why it is important to understand how efforts to build and strengthen relationships can impact the ability to take collective action. It is worth noting the overlap with a related strand of thinking: social capital.

James Coleman (2000) argues that social capital is a theoretical bridge between two highly flawed approaches to thinking about human social behaviour: the sociological tradition that sees human action determined by social structures and the economic rational actor tradition that sees human beings as free to take utility-maximizing decisions. He draws from both economic and sociological thinking to construct social capital from a more systemic understanding of human behaviour (Coleman, 2000, p. 14): ‘Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of

some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure.’

I understand this conception of social capital as an attempt to ground explanations of human behaviour in their complex systemic context (though neither Coleman nor the other major social capital theorists explicitly say so). Here he says that social capital, which, ‘[l]ike other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible,’ (Coleman, 2000, p. 16) is rooted in the dynamic interplay between relational structures and relational dynamics. He goes on to say, ‘Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implements of production’ (Coleman, 2000, p. 16).

In the choice of agency as a conceptual framework, I draw on many of the same insights that Coleman articulates: especially the importance of seeing human behaviour as conditioned by social structures even as it has the potential to reshape those structures. However, the point, for Coleman and many other social capital thinkers, is to use these insights to construct the social capital concept, which can then inform models of social and economic outcomes. They ground the concept in a superficially systemic understanding of human behaviour, but a close examination at that level is not their aim. The point, especially for the World Bank (Chhibber, 2000; Narayan and Pritchett, 2000), is to create a metric that can be captured as quantitative data for economic (or at least econometric) models.

On the other hand, I follow Emirbayer and Mische in disentangling structure and agency, choosing to focus on agency as a phenomenon in its own right. As explained earlier, I see agency as emerging from the interplay of relational structures and relational dynamics in a social system. While I embrace the concept of social capital as being very much in line with this thinking, I do not find it useful for my analysis. In focusing on agency, I continually revisit the fundamental nature of systems in my analysis.

2.7.1. Organizing

Organizing is the practice of building and strengthening relationships in order to strengthen agency. There are many forms of organizing practiced by activists and

organizations around the world. In this project, I brought with me training in and experience with a particular American form of organizing. In the SCSVUP project, I encountered two different forms of organizing in the Indian Alliance model (practiced by SPARC) and PRIA's own form of organizing based on participatory research. In the following sections, I outline each of these approaches to organizing theory and practice. I also consider the potential for reciprocal contributions between organizing and social change research.

Organizing practice that I encountered in the USA – which loosely falls within the Alinsky tradition (Boyte, 2008; Chambers and Cowan, 2006) - is built on the premise that citizens of all types have the capacity for political action and that by building networks of mutually self-interested relationships, even poor and 'powerless' people may develop the skills and capacities to act in their own interest (Swarts, 2008; Warren, 2001). An important element of organizing is that there is power in building those relationships and developing individual and collective capacities to act quite apart from whatever goals are set or issues engaged (Chambers and Cowan, 2006). In other words, organizing is about developing the capacities for people-powered social change, but successful social change is not the only valuable outcome. The transformative experience of organizing is itself a sufficient end goal.

Local-level grassroots organizing is not unique to the US context. Development research has also begun to articulate the importance of local-level organizers. The Pathways of Women's Empowerment collaborative conducted research across the global south to investigate tangible pathways for women to achieve empowerment politically, socially, and economically. Among their 12 key findings was 'Women's organising is vital for sustainable change' (Pathways, 2011). They explain 'Working women coming together to demand better conditions, recognition and rights can gain strength from each other and join their voices to insist on being heard.' and further, 'Our work also shows that through collective mobilisation women can gain a sense of their own self-worth, and come together to recognise those aspects of their lives that are unfair and oppressive' (Pathways, 2011).

Research done by the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) on female sex workers in India has also revealed the importance of organizing. Organizing among the sex workers has been a cornerstone of their approach, both to research the nature and challenges of sex work in India as well as to empower the sex workers to be active agents of their own lives (Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, 2009a). This initiative

stresses that self-confidence and leadership skills can be fostered and developed in anyone, and the KHPT offers training and resources for this purpose. Participating in collective action, especially within the context of a community-based organization (CBO), has proven to be transformative and empowering for many female sex workers, giving them the confidence and capacities to take ownership of their life choices (even while choosing to remain in the sex industry), to assert their own human dignity in the face of discrimination and social stigma, and to take active roles in public life (Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, 2009a, 2009b).

A number of research programmes have examined organizing practice in development projects, including the Citizenship DRC project at IDS (Coelho and Von Lieres, 2010; Gaventa and Barrett, 2012; Gaventa and Merrifield, 2002; Roque and Shankland, 2007), and have pointed out the importance of citizen-led initiatives that seek creative opportunities to build collaborations with government, build self-help capacities within communities, and build capabilities of co-production of services with government in ways that strengthen the legitimacy of communities in the eyes of government and wider society. However, Lavalle et al. (2005) argue that the existence of grassroots level organizations or local associations – for example women’s self-help groups – alone does not guarantee effective agency or improved development outcomes. More needs to be understood about the kinds of relational practice that are effective at strengthening agency within these associations.

As with the idea of networking for social change, knowledge is needed that goes beyond the fact that organizing practice matters. More needs to be understood about how everyday people and local associations can build effective organizing capacities and practices. My research considers this issue. I offer reflections on how organizing can be brought into the research process as well as how research can be brought into organizing practice.

2.7.2. An American approach to organizing

Activists and leaders from the many waves of social change efforts throughout American history have contributed to a rich set of perspectives on organizing. From the populist movement of the late 19th century, to the labour movement, to the civil rights movement (Boyte, 2008), people within communities and beyond them have drawn from and contributed to this rich tapestry. In this thesis, I make a distinction between

social change movements (and theories about how they function) and organizing, though I recognize that they are interlinked (Stall and Stoecker, 1998, p. 730). It cannot be said that there is one American approach to organizing, but there is a coherence to the strands of American organizing history, even as they have at various points become intertwined and then diverged.

Some of the most prominent voices on organizing in the USA are those descended from Saul Alinsky. Alinsky was based in Chicago, where he helped build grassroots power amongst poor communities and helped organize workers into labour unions (Alinsky, 1989, 1971). Alinsky himself drew on tactics common to labour organizing of the time, through his experiences interacting with the CIO in the Back of the Yards area of Chicago (Polletta, 2002, p. 179; Pyles, 2013, pp. 63–5). He also saw himself as inheritor of the populist movement (Bretherton, 2012), which tended to confound the left-right, conservative-progressive binaries of the time.

This Alinsky tradition has faced a number of criticisms regarding the extent to which the approach contributes to justice and progress. The main tenets of the approach⁹ include:

- a professional, outside organizer that helps the community come together around areas of shared self-interest, helps identify and nurture local leadership, but avoids taking responsibility for driving change processes
- the concept of self-interest, which is seen as the motivating force for people to get involved and is in contrast to charity or voluntarism, which is seen as less effective for creating sustainable change
- the concept of public life, which is conceptualised in contrast to private life in such a way as to open spaces and possibilities for people working together even if they disagree on many other things or would never be ‘friends’ (i.e. minority groups and racists might find ways to work together on some issues); and
- a pragmatic approach to process that emphasises a recognition of existing structures (‘the world as it is’) that must frame change efforts (hope for ‘the world as it should be’).

Alinsky’s conviction, and that of many Alinsky-style organizations, that the organizer must be a paid professional outsider has been a major source of criticism. Boyte (1981) argued that, rather than successfully nurturing local leadership, this approach often leads to dependency on the outside organizer. A feminist approach articulated by Stall and Stoecker (1998) and others (Bradshaw et al., 1994; Reynoso,

⁹ For detailed descriptions of this approach, see Chambers and Cowan (2006), Swarts (2008), Dreier (2009), Schutz and Miller (2015), and Warren (2001).

2005) as well as a ‘consensus’ approach (Beck and Eichler, 2000; Polletta, 2002, chap. 7) articulate a different vision of the organizer role which can be played by anyone (or everyone) within the community. In these alternative approaches to organizing, the skills and tactics of organizing can be used, not to identify local leaders, but in the practice of local leadership itself.

Alinsky’s conceptualisation of self-interest has also been critiqued (Levine, 1973; Polletta, 2002, p. 186) for assuming that actors within communities held fixed interests which could be identified and used as a foundation for a broad coalition. The alternative would be to see self-interest as something dynamic that can be shaped through organizing to lead to greater ‘self-awareness’ within communities (Bradshaw et al., 1994).

Building on this, advocates of a feminist approach to organizing challenge the public-private division (Reynoso, 2005, p. 160; Stall and Stoecker, 1998, p. 732). For Alinsky and his descendants, the idea of a public sphere makes relationships possible that could not happen in private (i.e. partnering with a politician but not seeing the politician as ‘friend’ or ‘father’ (Chambers and Cowan, 2006, p. 29)). In the feminist alternative, the private relationships developed through friendship and family can build affirming and empowering bonds – also across divisions of race and class – which can lead to political or public action where desired (Polletta, 2002, chap. 6; Stall and Stoecker, 1998, p. 733).

This challenge from feminist and ‘consensus’ organizing also points out that Alinsky-style organizing has a weak track record for challenging social hierarchies and inequalities. Stall and Stoecker (1998) argue that, especially in the early days of Alinsky’s own organizations, men were seen as more capable of taking public action (taking largely for granted that women would find it difficult to operate outside the home on issues departing from domestic matters). This led to a ‘masculine’ style of confrontational organizing that failed to act on issues related to gender, race, or disability (Cummings and Eagly, 2006, pp. 488–90; Polletta, 2002, p. 188).

This goes hand in hand with a critique of Alinsky’s pragmatism. By eschewing ideological motivations in favour of ‘self-interest’, Alinsky-style organizing seeks to avoid entrenchment and open possibilities for working with others across ideological divides where there is mutual benefit. The critique points to instances where failure to see the motivating power of ideology (i.e. feminism (Reynoso, 2005), black liberation (Dobbie and Richards-Schuster, 2008) and environmentalism (Bradshaw et al., 1994, p.

28)) led some potential partners to become alienated by the Alinsky approach. In its strongest form, this critique argues that by starting with pragmatic compromises within ‘the world as it is’, the Alinsky approach to organizing lacks a vision for fundamental social change (Bradshaw et al., 1994, p. 28; Levine, 1973). This is perhaps unfair, given the extent to which contemporary Alinsky-style organizations such as the IAF articulate a vision of hope for ‘the world as it should be’ (Chambers and Cowan, 2006, chap. 1) and the extent to which hope and change were motivating factors in the Obama campaign (drawing directly on his training within the Alinsky-style Gamaliel Foundation) (Boyte and Gordon, 2012).

I was trained in an approach to organizing that drew from the Alinsky tradition, takings bits from organizations such as the IAF and ACORN but incorporating lessons from their critics as well, by organizers at the University of Minnesota. Harry Boyte, Dennis Donovan, and the Center for Democracy and Citizenship used these principles to guide their own approach to organizing that led to a number of strong and successful organizing programmes in the Twin Cities area. The Jane Addams School, Public Achievement, and CHANCE were three major programmes that built on this approach. These used the IAF focus on ‘power precedes program’ but worked with individuals to build their leadership capacities, working in the context of institutional relationships.

In the Jane Addams School, those relationships were built as individuals participated in adult education courses (Longo, 2007). In Public Achievement, the relationships took place within public school classrooms as organizer/coaches worked directly with students to take action in their communities (Augsburg College, 2016; Hildreth, 2014). CHANCE used the institutional context of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs (the Masters students) and its location within the predominantly immigrant Cedar-Riverside neighbourhood (Center for Integrated Leadership, 2015) to train students as organizers and build relational power with people living in the neighbourhood. As mentioned in chapter 1, I participated in the CHANCE program, where I built relationships with leaders within the Somali and East African immigrant communities. This was the foundation for my work as an organizer in the Cedar-Riverside neighbourhood. I brought this training and experience with me into the SCSVUP project. There I encountered the organizing practices and traditions of the other project partners, discussed in the next section, and together we devised an organizing practice for the project.

2.7.3. Two Indian approaches to organizing

It is an understatement to say that India contains a dizzyingly diverse set of cultures, social arrangements, and histories of collective action (Guha, 2008; Sen, 2006). From the non-violence and work-centred Gandhian tradition (Gandhi and Desai, 2001; Goswami, 2009; Ramagundam, 2004) to the violent Maoist insurgencies of the ‘Naxal belt’ (Pandita, 2011), India contains a full spectrum of approaches to civic, social, religious, and political life. Rajesh Tandon (2002b, p. 30), in attempting to situate his own thinking and the work of PRIA, says, ‘the terrain of contemporary voluntary action in the Indian society is extremely diverse and heterogeneous. In includes the small and the large, Gandhians and radicals, new professionals and social workers.’ Each of these, no doubt, has its own particular approach to the philosophy and practice of nurturing relational power – whether explicitly articulated or left unexplored.

In this thesis, I explore two particular approaches to organizing that have emerged within this Indian context and which shaped the SCSVUP project. These are the organizing approaches of the Indian Alliance and PRIA. It should be noted that PRIA and the members of the Indian Alliance are more than their organizing practice. In their own words, neither specifically emphasises their organizing practice as the most important aspect of what they do. In this section, I attempt to do justice to the fullness of their character, but I deliberately focus on their approaches to organizing – that is their approaches to building and strengthening relationships in order to strengthen agency.

I examine these two approaches to organizing because of the central role played by SPARC (the NGO supporting organization within the Indian Alliance) and PRIA within the SCSVUP project. SPARC was an institutional partner with PRIA on this SCSVUP project. While PRIA was responsible for projects in Raipur, Jaipur, and Patna, SPARC managed similar projects in a few dozen other cities around India. As a result, SPARC and their unique approach to organizing for social change shaped the framing of this project from the outset, but they were not directly involved. Rather, PRIA, which has its own unique approach to organizing and working for social change, chose how to structure this particular project.

The Indian Alliance approach to organizing

The Indian Alliance is a cooperation between SPARC, the National Slum Dwellers Federation, and Mahila Milan. The detailed history of how this unique institution emerged has been recorded by some of the participants (Patel, 1996; Patel et al., 2016; Patel and Bartlett, 2016; Patel and Mitlin, 2001). SPARC is an NGO that began working with women pavement dwellers in Mumbai in 1984. Those pavement dwellers formed into a federation under the name Mahila Milan. Over the later years of the 1980s, SPARC and Mahila Milan also began working with the National Slum Dwellers Federation, which had independently begun organizing under the leadership of Jockin Arputham against settlement clearances in Mumbai. The Alliance has grown beyond India to include federations of slum dwellers and support NGOs in other countries under the name Slum/Shack Dwellers International (Mitlin and Patel, 2014; Patel et al., 2001).

In an important article championing the Alliance approach, Arjun Appadurai (2002) argues that it represents a departure from existing approaches to addressing poverty or community organizing. He specifically contrasts it with a traditional Alinsky-style approach, ‘Instead of relying on the model of an outside organizer who teaches local communities how to hold the state to its normative obligations to the poor, the Alliance is committed to methods of organization, mobilization, teaching, and learning that build on what poor persons already know and understand’ (p.28).

In this way, Appadurai argues that the main features of the Indian Alliance organizational philosophy are: federating, saving, and precedent-setting. Federating, as Appadurai (2002, p. 32) describes it, is to the Alliance, the source of its relational power: ‘At its foundation is the idea of individuals and families self-organizing as members of a political collective to pool resources, organize lobbying, provide mutual risk-management devices, and confront opponents, when necessary.’

Savings is the ritual practice that ties members of a community to each other: sharing the burden of self-help, the risks of borrowing, and the benefits of building a shared resource and safety net (Appadurai, 2002, p. 33). Precedent-setting is the outgrowth of the emphasis on experiential knowledge. As Appadurai (2002, p. 34) explains, ‘The linguistic strategy of precedent-setting thus turns the survival tactics and experiments of the poor into sites for policy innovations by the state, the city, donor agencies, and other activist organizations. It is a strategy that moves the poor into the horizon of legality on their own terms.’

Based on these notions, the Indian Alliance approach to organizing centres around building relational power – within the Federation’s member organizations as well as at the level of the Alliance – through shared experience with a set of ritual practices. These include self-enumerations, sanitation, and housing upgrading (Appadurai, 2002, p. 35). These areas of activity, discussed below, have functioned as the arenas of the Alliance’s organizing practice.

The Alliance champions its method of local people carrying out their own surveys, which provides a foundation for influencing policy-making and implementation (Patel et al., 2012). In the context of the BSUP, the precursor policy to the RAY, Sheela Patel (2013) of SPARC argued governments must work together with community organizations in informal settlements throughout the processes of assessing, planning, implementing, and maintaining improvements. The community organizations with which she and SPARC work are members of federations such as Mahila Milan and NSDF, who in turn ‘have the capacity to provide the mapping and detailed household surveys that slum upgrading needs’ (Patel, 2013, p. 188). How these local associations or community organizations formed and how they operate is usually not described. The SPARC approach is to support these local organizers and associations, but the particular process of building and strengthening the local relationships is not provided in this literature.

For example, the Indian Alliance has been involved in decades of work on the issue of sanitation in informal settlements. Patel and the SPARC team described the process:

Between 1987 and 1993, when the P D’Mello Road toilet was finally built, the pavement dwellers continued to transform themselves from helpless individuals to organized communities... Part of the Alliance’s mode of operation has always involved exchanges among federation members – whether between communities, between cities or even between countries. When slum dwellers visit one another, the learning is intense... As this process spread to other cities in India, it was not just about building toilets. It was about building organized communities. These toilets provided an important practical focus for the federating principles of the Alliance (Patel and Team, 2015, p. 58).

However, the process of ‘transforming themselves’ is not fully described. Still, the Alliance model puts a focus on the building of relationships and the importance of organizing work. Patel and the team argue, ‘The most valuable outcome of a good sanitation project is the relationship that links communities and their leadership to the city and to other communities,’ (2015, p. 71) and ‘the real challenge here is to organize

communities that will partner with the city to manage and maintain what has been built' (2015, p. 71).

SPARC supports local associations of slum dwellers with their work. The Federation takes responsibility for the day-to-day community organizing work (Patel, 1996, p. 1). While SPARC has 'middle class professionals' who are employed as staff, NSDF is "'owned" by the slum dwellers' (Patel, 1996, p. 5) who make up the Federations' member associations.

As opposed to the 'professional' staff of the NGO, the NSDF frames its work as 'built on voluntarism' (Patel, 1996, p. 16). As of 1996, there were 35 to 40 people employed full time by NSDF, while the other leaders were only entitled to compensation from time away from their regular jobs. Presumably these core Federation leaders were employed to do organizing and mobilising work – forming new associations, building relational links to other member associations, and training up the local association members to be leaders and community organizers within their own communities.

This was not always the case. Patel and Mitlin (2001, p. 9) explain,

Initially, SPARC was a great "doer". This role was both due to the learning needs of its leadership and the absence of the relationship with NSDF between 1984 and 1987. For some time, most settlement organizing was done jointly but, gradually, the local federations took over these tasks, with back-up and support from SPARC. Now, the back-up and support role is provided by the core leadership of NSDF and Mahila Milan, with SPARC taking on "trouble-shooting" roles as required.

Even as SPARC now leaves the organizing work to the NSDF and the local communities, it sees itself as proactively managing relationships within the organization at that level. This is, no less than the organizing work within communities that leads to functioning local associations, an important form of organizing. Patel (1996, p. 15) explains that

[t]he alliance sees the management of its internal relationships as the most vital. For this i[t] pays a considerable price, but gains tremendous strength... SPARC representatives, being partners, fully voice their concerns and reservations when [an] activity emerges from the community. So too do community leaders when SPARC suggests something.

In this way, we see that while SPARC leaves the day-to-day organizing work to the Federation and the local member associations, it takes a proactive approach to managing and nurturing the relationships within the Alliance that are the source of their collective power.

More detail about the internal community organizing work is shown in the biography of NSDF founder, Jockin Arputham. In an autobiographical article, he explains that his everyday experience living in an informal settlement in Mumbai led him and his community to develop mapping, surveys, and collecting information as ‘tools for organizing’ (Arputham, 2008, p. 336). He also tells the story of one of the first major organizing efforts he engaged in to avoid eviction (Arputham, 2008, p. 325):

In 1967/68, the Bhabha Atomic Energy Commission gave notice to the people living in Janata colony that they should vacate their land, to allow this authority to expand. I got involved in a kind of community association mobilizing against this. I went round, talking to all the different community organizations – cultural, religious, political – and bringing them together. There were 70,000 people in total in the colony. So we got all the community organizations involved and formed an action committee. We got all the Tamil Nadu political parties to agree to work together and to weld all these parties into one.

This begins to describe the relational work of bringing people together, building and strengthening relationships to strengthen agency. It is interesting to note that, in his description of the process of organizing, he mentions bringing together existing cultural, religious, and political community organizations to form a broad base, which resonates with the IAF approach.

Sheela Patel echoes the usage of practical forms of collective action as the foundation of organizing (Patel, 2004). She describes the process of using activities such as data collection to strengthen relationships and build capacities within communities (Patel and Sharma, 1998, p. 156):

When slum communities and volunteers undertake data collection, it is not just a mechanical process. The data they produce is enriched by their overall understanding of the problems. Often, the quantification process cannot collate this rich information base, and innovative and new experimental strategies need to be explored to document this knowledge. The process is used to mobilize the community so that they have a sense of ownership of the census and the data.

To sum up the Alliance model of organizing, community organizers or leaders from within the community build and strengthen relationships within their settlements, often through carrying out a collective action such as a self-enumeration, creating a savings group, building a toilet, or resisting eviction. This building and strengthening of relationships leads to a local association that can become part of a wider federation such as NSDF. It can work with SPARC to facilitate learning exchanges with community members and organizers from other settlements, other professions, and other geographic locations.

The nuts and bolts of the building and strengthening of relationships (the organizing practice) can be glimpsed in the reflections of Jockin, the most public face of NSDF. His approach seems remarkably similar to the reflections of Alinsky-style organizers, especially in terms of the intentional bringing together of existing cultural, religious, and political organizations. He describes multiple iterations of building and strengthening relationships in his community and with parts of the wider society to address waves of challenges over time. He discusses the pragmatic practice of negotiating with authorities using force as well as cooperation, at times threatening to use bombs (Arputham, 2008, p. 332) and at others being careful to avoid traffic disruptions (Patel and Arputham, 2008, p. 250).

PRIA's approach to organizing

In attempting to understand PRIA's approach to organizing, it is crucial to understand the strands of theory and practice that PRIA emerged from, position themselves within, and continue to contribute to. PRIA stands for Participatory Research in Asia, highlighting its grounding within the 'participatory research' strand of the Participatory Action Research¹⁰ tradition. This participatory research lineage includes thinkers and activists such as Paulo Freire (2000; Horton and Freire, 1990) and Myles Horton (Horton et al., 1998) that saw potential for empowerment and social change in adult education (Hall, 2001). Their approach to education included practices of co-learning (learning from each other rather than from an expert teacher) and valuing practical and traditional forms of knowledge (challenging technocratic expert knowledge).

In the writings of PRIA founder and President Rajesh Tandon, an evolution in thinking and practice can be seen over time from emphasising this participatory research practice to considering PRIA's role shaping and being shaped by the concept of civil society. Reflecting on the history of PRIA, Tandon recalled the major influences on his thinking and PRIA's approach to adult education and community organizing:

The seminal works of Paulo Freire in Brazil and Myles Horton in Appalachia (USA) intermingled with Gandhian philosophy and Nyerere's attempts in Tanzania. Putting people at the centre was the thrust of Tanzania's experiments with 'Ujama'. Gandhi's approach of 'antodyay' implied that the last person

¹⁰ I discuss this tradition in greater detail as a paradigm with various methodologies in chapter 3.

should do it first. Myles emphasized collective learning and self-organizing by the agents of change themselves— workers, poor, colored people in southern USA. Freire's pedagogy emphasized conscientization as an approach to emancipation. These perspectives and practices became the foundation of the movement of Participatory Research by the late 1970s (2008, p. 288).

But in the late 90s and early 2000s, Tandon struggled with the newfound global prominence and recognition of organizations like PRIA through the conceptual lens of civil society (Tandon and Mohanty, 2003, 2002). He found the concept of civil society to be problematic a) because the concept was being imported and applied in India, crowding out home-grown concepts that could have more precisely made sense of the unique social reality of India, and b) because it was so broad as to obfuscate more about the collection of actors under that label than it clarified.

In the book Voluntary Action, Civil Society, and the State, Tandon (2002b, pp. 17–30) attempted to reframe civil society as voluntary action for the common good, drawing on India's particular history. He created a typology of associations and organizations based on their inspirations (for example, religious groups or radical socialist groups), their rationales (providing material assistance and resources, community development support, empowerment struggles, and supporting general social reform), and their functions (service providers, development promoters, support providers, and umbrella associations). It is within this diverse milieu that PRIA and other civil society organizations operate, drawing from various sources of inspiration and approaches to taking action that motivate people. In these writings, it is clear that PRIA and Rajesh Tandon have not only advanced an agenda of participatory research, but they have advanced an agenda of reshaping and reframing Indian civil society in their image.

Still, PRIA was also inevitably influenced by that new civil society form of public action. In an undated document posted on PRIA's website (PRIA, n.d.), they outline seven different phases of work that the organization has implemented since its founding:

- Systematising local knowledge for empowerment (1981-1986)
- Building competencies as change agents (1986-1991)
- Institutional strengthening of civil society (1991-1997)
- Accountable local governance (1997-2001)
- Governance from below (2002-2008)
- Multi-sectoral engagements for deepening democracy (2008-2013)
- Reconnecting with Roots (2013-onwards).

This perhaps explains the different areas of focus that emerged from Tandon's writings over the years, including his different thinking about what civil society is as well as the best way for PRIA to engage in that civil society.

It may also explain the tensions in PRIA's relational practice through the SCSVUP project. In the beginning, PRIA emphasised participatory research. By the 1990s, it was emphasising its role as a 'support organization' that supported smaller NGOs and community organizations rather than organizing directly with communities (Brown and Tandon, 1990). In the documentation for the SCSVUP project, PRIA presents its role as being a bridge between civil society and government (PRIA, 2011). It is clear that the project was meant to engage people living in informal settlements, but it is not clear whether and how those people fit into the 'civil society' whose voices are to be strengthened. In chapter 7, I explore how this tension between PRIA's thinking about civil society and the demands of engaging with people in informal settlements played out during the project.

Here it is important to note that, in the evolution of PRIA's theory and practice, Tandon and the organization have struggled to balance fidelity to its radical roots in participatory research with the need for a professional and efficient organization that must exist within Indian civil society. Like SPARC, the work of the organization has an ambiguous relationship to the on-the-ground organizing that takes place within its projects and partner communities. It is clear that PRIA sees organized communities to be an important outcome of its work, but, in its choice of conceptual grounding and framing, it leaves the nuts and bolts of that relational organizing work under-theorised. Later, in chapter 7, I explore the ways these three organizing traditions came together, as interpreted and implemented in the SCSVUP project by PRIA and Chetna staff and myself.

2.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the major sets of theories in which my research is grounded. My research explores how the agency of people living in informal settlements works and how it can be strengthened. I have made the case that urban informal settlements exhibit the properties of a complex system, and therefore to understand agency, I argue that conceptual and methodological tools are required that are capable of treating complexity.

I have argued along with Emirbayer and Mische (1998) that agency deserves to be a central object of inquiry in its own right, beyond its traditionally overdetermined interrelationship with structure. In this thesis, agency is essentially the capacity to act. That capacity to act is clearly conditioned by the systemic context, but it is not completely determined by it. Agency is a function of social structures, but a non-linear one. In this thesis, I consider social structures primarily as social networks – the relationships that participants hold to be relevant to their lives. In addition to relational structures, relational dynamics – social norms, behavioural patterns, processes of identity formation, and political practices – also condition agency. However, as much as these things condition agency, agency also affords their reshaping. This intimate relationship between agency, its systemic context, and the action it catalyses is poetically captured by Hannah Arendt's (1998) *natality* – that almost mystical quality of human nature that holds the possibility (the hope, as Arendt claims) of creating something new or creating change even in the face of constraints.

I have attempted a conceptual depiction of these interrelations in figure 1. This diagram portrays the lines of influence between agency and some major features of the complex systemic context. Relational dynamics and relational structures each impact agency but are impacted by agency in return. Mediation, which is a kind of hybrid structure-dynamic, and collective action also impact agency and are impacted by agency in return. This conceptual framework is derived from the 'generative' approach of Epstein (2007) and Fararo and Butts (1999); it attempts to explain how agency can be strengthened by explicitly considering how systemic behavioural patterns and the relationship patterns come together to generate the conditions of agency. The framing of the relevant features of the system as these four boxes is informed by my reading of the literature as well as what seemed to resonate with my experiences in the research. These four boxes then serve as the foundations of my four inquiry streams, which ultimately addressed my thesis' research question.

I have also provided an introduction to the complexity concepts upon which I have built my empirical analysis. In the next chapter, I explain how I went about exploring the research questions detailed here. As I have argued in this chapter that complex issues require analytical tools capable of incorporating complexity, in the next chapter I argue that complex issues also require research methods and a research design that are capable of capturing relevant data on that complexity.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This thesis explores how agency can be strengthened for people living in informal settlements in Raipur. Chapter 2 presented the conceptual framework with which I approached this research, including my approaches to agency and complexity. Specifically, I argued that human lives are lived in the context of complex social systems made up of many relationships at multiple levels. I also made the case that agency is conditioned (variously facilitated or constrained) by factors stemming from that complexity and the systemic nature of human social existence.

This chapter discusses how I followed the inquiry streams to explore my research questions. First I explain the action research (Levin, 1999; Reason and Bradbury, 2007a) paradigm as the foundation for my research, with its particular critique of positivist social research. I note that, while I acknowledge the critique of positivism, what is most important is to find the set of methodological tools that most accurately addresses the research questions. For this research, it meant drawing on some positivist tools and some constructivist tools, applying them within their appropriate domains, and combining a diversity of perspectives to get a clearer systemic picture of agency in the systemic context.

On top of the action research paradigm, I chose two different methodologies, each with their unique sets of methods, to capture different aspects of agency. Systemic Action Research (SAR) allowed me to construct a ‘soft’ systems understanding of agency by bringing together multiple perspectives from different participants from across the system (Burns, 2007), in line with the ‘dialogical’ approach to complexity advocated by the STEPS Centre at IDS (Scoones et al., 2007). At the same time, Social Network Analysis (SNA) allowed me to estimate one feature of the ‘hard’ systems present in the informal settlements – the social network of the participants (Scott and Carrington, 2011; Wasserman and Faust, 2007).

For each methodology, I describe the particular methods I chose to gather and analyse data about agency in the systemic context. SAR required a more constructivist approach to systemic inquiry and generated extensive qualitative data of various forms: interviews, facilitated group discussions, participatory maps, and more. SNA required a

more positivist approach and generated quantitative data on relational structures that make up an important part of the participants' social system.

After explaining each of the methods, the data generated, and how each type of data was analysed, I move on in the second half of the chapter to describe the research design: how the methods and the data they generated were employed, how the participants and I experienced the research process, and how the data generated by the methods was synthesised into knowledge about agency and how it can be strengthened. Here I also discuss issues of risk and ethics and how they were addressed throughout the research.

Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the extent to which my research design was able to capture the complexity of social change processes. In chapter 2, I made the case that because agency is an emergent and systemic property of human social systems, a new way of exploring agency would be necessary for capturing that complexity. In this chapter, I describe my attempt to innovate such a method, and I close by reflecting on the extent to which my methodological approach was successful.

3.1. Methodology and Methods

In this first section of the chapter, I describe the research paradigm, the methodologies, and the methods employed in this research. I discuss them in order, from more abstract to more particular.

3.1.1. Research Questions

As a reminder, my primary research question was

‘How can the agency of people living in informal settlements be strengthened through efforts to build new relationships and new relational dynamics?’

In chapter 2 I argued, based on my conceptual framework, that to answer that question required four streams of inquiry that could investigate agency in its systemic context.

Those streams essentially explored the following questions:

‘What are patterns of relational dynamics in informal settlements in Raipur?’

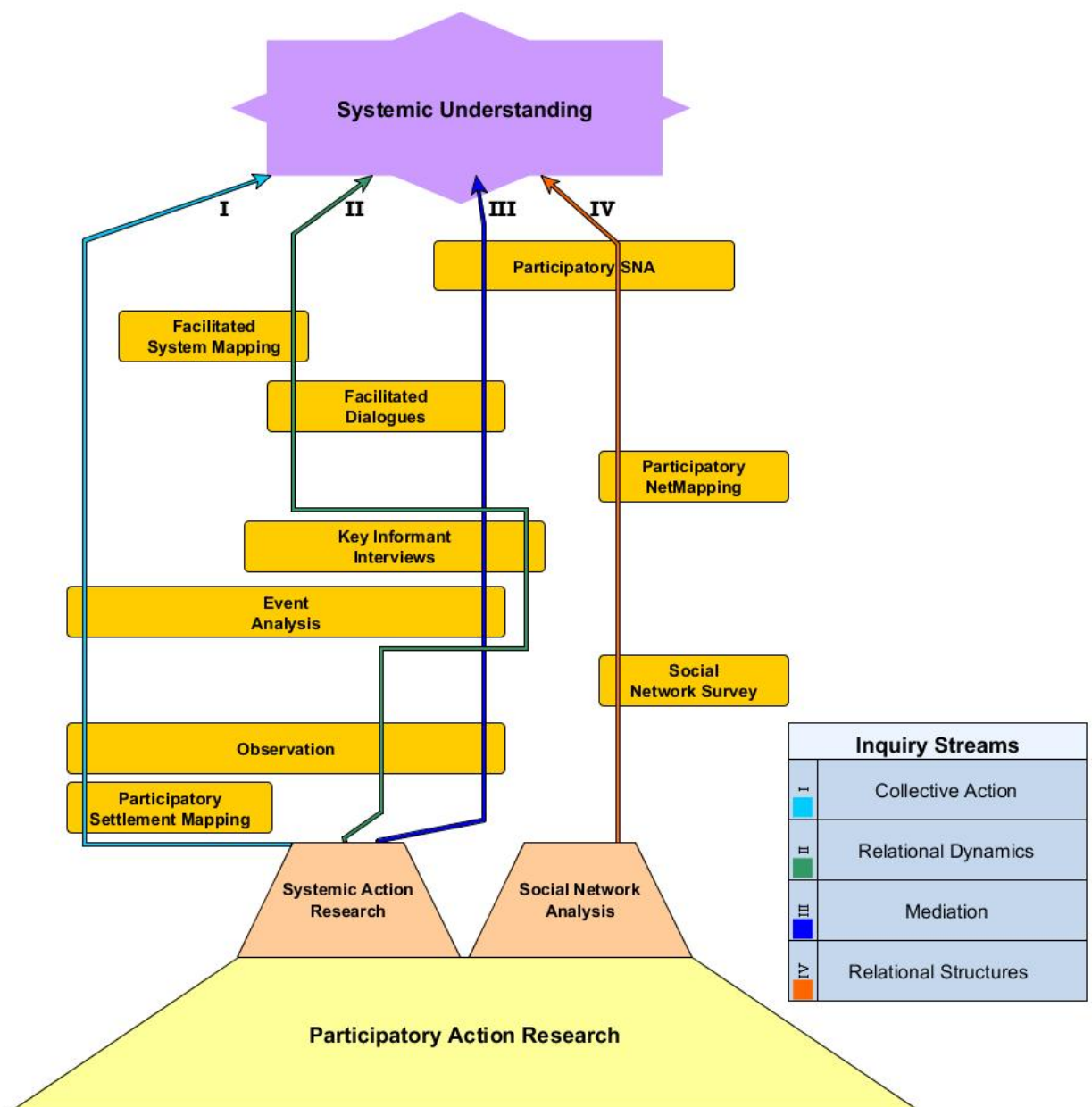
‘What are patterns of mediation in informal settlements in Raipur?’

‘What are patterns of relational structures in informal settlements in Raipur?’

‘What are patterns of collective action in informal settlements?’

For each of these inquiry streams, I chose a particular set of methods. Some methods were used across multiple inquiry streams. This is graphically depicted in figure 2 below. I depict the Participatory Action Research paradigm as the foundation for this research with the Systemic Action Research and Social Network Analysis methodologies above. Then the four inquiry streams are shown extending from their respective methodology, passing through the particular sets of methods that were employed for each stream, and finally being synthesized into a systemic understanding of agency at the top.

Figure 2. Methods used in inquiry streams



3.1.2. The Action Research Paradigm

In chapter 2, I explained my choice of agency as the primary concept at the centre of my research. Reflected in the articulation of the research question and secondary questions (the inquiry streams) is my concern that my research not only provide an original contribution to human knowledge, but also to contribute to solving some of the social problems that matter to the participants. I did not merely want to know how agency works for people living in informal settlements. I wanted to know how agency can be strengthened. The paradigm of (participatory) action research affords a particularly useful way of addressing such a question. This paradigm insists that knowledge is created and used through social processes and that such knowledge cannot be value-neutral. It further insists that, for questions about social change (making things ‘better’), knowledge is not valid without the input and ownership of those experiencing (or desiring) the social change. It is important that they be the ones to define ‘better’. Strengthening agency makes no sense outside of a paradigm capable of meaningful integration into people’s lives as they live and experience them.

Action research is most commonly conceived of as a set of practices that 1) connects theory with practice and 2) establishes and emphasizes the dialogical relationship between researcher and researched (van Beinum, 1999, p. 9). Action research challenges assumptions of objectivity and positivism common in much social scientific research, opening spaces for learning about subjective human experience. Further, action research takes on the task of making things better (van Beinum, 1999, p. 10). That is, action research has traditionally presupposed that creating social change is an acceptable and desirable product of research, and that intentionally working for social change does not compromise the validity or integrity of the research.

Action research has a varied history and means different things to different practitioners. Rather than thinking of action research as a discreet methodology, I prefer to frame it as a research paradigm within which appropriate methodologies and methods can be assembled (Burns, 2007, p. 11; Reason and Bradbury, 2007b, p. 1). It leads to a space of inquiry that can hold of a variety of methods, including but not limited to traditional qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Action research has been deployed using a range of practices to address a variety of social concerns (Fals Borda, 2007) – from organizational management (Levin, 1999, p. 27) to adult education (Freire, 2000; Horton and etc, 1997; Horton and Freire, 1990)

to social movements and citizen mobilization (Tandon, 2002c). In spite of this diversity, what is consistent across contexts is the critique of positivism and the orientation towards participatory action as a means of pursuing a better world.

3.1.2.1. Epistemology and critique of positivism

From the beginning action research has articulated a unique approach to epistemological issues. Rajesh Tandon writes ‘Influenced by the research paradigm of natural sciences, social science research has also assumed that there is one truth about social phenomena. The reality of social systems and phenomena is not physically determined alone; it is also socially constructed’ (Tandon, 2002c, p. 5). To learn about social reality, one must create that knowledge through human meaning-making processes. To be an action researcher is to accept and embrace that the researcher is part of the system, learning by doing, changing and being changed in the process. Further, in order to do this effectively, one must bring all of one’s being and experience to the research and not keep rigid boundaries (Burns, 2007, p. 138). Action research assumes a ‘living, dialogical relationship between research and development’ wherein insights should not be seen as ‘representing an unequivocal and true reality, when what we are trying to describe is a process that is formative, interactive, and unfinished’ (van Beinum, 1999, p. 8).

The legitimacy and quality of action research is no less important than for other types of research, but it must be different. It is fundamentally related to the researchers’ self-awareness and abilities to facilitate meaningful dialogue. Reason and Bradbury (2007b) argue that quality comes from being as transparent as possible about choices that are made. Danny Burns (2007, pp. 158–60) suggests that the quality of action research can be seen in how well it articulates the dynamics of change and the extent to which it produces ‘resonance’ across multiple inquiry streams. Resonance is the phenomenon of variations of an insight emerging from different points of view and different types of inquiry. When something keeps coming up over and over again, it is likely to be important.

The approach to learning and knowledge-creation taken by action research can be seen as an attempt to address the shortcomings of positivist social science. If knowledge is embedded, context-specific, and fundamentally related to human experience, recognizing these facts makes action research potentially more honest and more scientific, rather than less. Claude Faucheux (1999, p. 40) argues that action

research can be a ‘science of action’ involving observation, experimentation, and self-awareness: an inductive meaning-making process drawing on the scientific method.

This meaning-making process, according to action research, should take place in the context of a relationship between the researcher and the researched. In other types of research, the meaning-making (analysis) is the domain of the researcher exclusively, and takes place at some distance from the subject. That doesn’t mean it has escaped the relationship with the subject, just that the relationship is at great risk of being exploitative and extractive in nature. For this research, I have collected data in partnership with the project participants, and wherever possible, I have provided the data to the participants for their own analysis and use. I have also conducted my own analysis, which is reflected in this thesis, and where possible my findings have been informed by and validated by the participants.

3.1.3. Methodologies

3.1.3.1. Systemic Action Research (SAR)

Systemic Action Research (SAR) is a methodology grounded in the action research paradigm that seeks to bring a plurality of perspectives from across a social system together to arrive at an emergent understanding of social issues (Burns, 2007). In complex contexts, causation cannot be attributed perfectly, even with perfect knowledge. Therefore, SAR assumes, knowledge about causation must be partial, socially constructed, and contested. SAR makes knowledge construction social and contested within its processes so that the necessarily multiple perspectives can be brought to bear before understanding is claimed. For these reasons, SAR is particularly useful for accounting for complexity when making sense of what’s going on in social systems.

Burns, Harvey, and Aragon (2012) present a way of looking at complexity in action research settings: ‘many situations in which action research facilitators and participants intervene are not straightforward, i.e. there are many actors and factors that influence the way change does or does not emerge over time, and these influences are themselves changing and unknowable in their totality’. James, Slater, and Bucknam (2011, p. 23) define complexity in a slightly different way, but make the same argument. They say complexity ‘may be defined as properties that make a situation or set of relationships difficult to discuss accurately, even when given almost complete

information about its component parts and their interrelatedness'. When trying to make changes to a system with large numbers of variables that interact with each other in ways that are hard to disaggregate, they argue that action research creates a 'holding environment' in which to bring together and focus multiple perspectives on the issue.

One of the major learning goals of systemic action research is an emergent understanding of the order of the system. Whereas other types of action research might focus on one group (perhaps disenfranchised workers or a minority group facing discrimination), systemic action research brings diverse actors together for multiple inquiry streams employing a multiplicity of methods to probe system dynamics. Knowledge of the system is co-created through facilitated mapping exercises where insights from the different streams are integrated into a systemic understanding of how issues, people, and facts are interrelated (Burns, 2012, p. 95). This is not the result of linearly constructing an understanding from individual building blocks of information, but it is an emergent group knowledge that is, in some ways, greater than the sum of each participant's knowledge. This is because connections are made that individuals would not have been able to make alone, and the knowledge comes to exist in forms (like maps) that are external to the participants and no single one has a claim to the entirety.

The systemic action research methodology entails the following important features and research design principles, quoting from Burns (2007, p. 85):

- an emergent research design
- an exploratory inquiry phase
- multiple inquiry streams operating at different levels
- a structure for connecting organic inquiry to formal decision making
- a process for identifying cross-cutting links across inquiry streams
- a commitment to open boundary inquiry
- the active development of distributed leadership.

In my research, I incorporated these principles as follows. I spent the early time of my involvement in the SCSVUP as an exploratory inquiry phase in which to determine the research focus. I allowed the design of my research to emerge from my interactions with the various participants, which further allowed my individual research activities to synergise with the wider activities of the SCSVUP project. As explained in figure 2, I followed multiple inquiry streams throughout the research, each with its own set of

methods and focusing on different aspects of the system. I followed a practice of regular reflection and planning conversations with the NGO partners and the SIC participants to synthesise learning from our on-going actions and to feed tentative findings into action planning processes. Additionally, while I was committed to carrying out my independent research for this PhD, my everyday work was integrated into the SCSVUP project. Through this relational practice, I was able to maintain an openness about the focus of my inquiry over time as well as the purposes to which my research could be applied by the other participants. Finally, my research brought together a diverse set of approaches involving different skill sets. I continually learned from the other participants – especially about how to live, move, and be in the world of Raipur’s informal settlements – but I also had occasion to train both NGO partner participants and SIC participants on capacities such as systems thinking, social network analysis, GPS mapping, etc. In this way, our research practice fostered the development of professional skills and leadership in participants at all levels, including me.

In the next section, I describe the different methods I employed within the systemic action research methodology. I describe how I made use of the method, the set of participants involved, the data generated, and how the data was analysed. Individual methods were sometimes used across inquiry streams, providing opportunities for identifying cross-cutting themes. In the descriptions below, especially the descriptions of the methods used within the social network analysis methodology, I do not repeat the method descriptions. It is not critical to an understanding of this research to keep track of which methods were used in which inquiry stream, but this information is provided in figure 2. A summary of the methods used and the data generated by the methods can be found in table 1 at the end of this section.

Observation

Because my research involved bringing so much of myself into the everyday research practice, including the genuine relationships with the participants that I was able to forge, observation was the research method to which I devoted the most time and energy. I observed my surroundings, especially taking time to explore a city, society, country, and culture that were completely new to me at the beginning of my research. I observed the people I met, noting that many of my interactions with local people were mediated by translators. I observed myself coming to new understandings and experiencing culture shock as I became accustomed to life in Raipur. I collected

data in the form of field notes and reflections in my learning journal. This totalled 177 typed pages from April, 2012, until August, 2013.

In refining my approach to observation, I studied approaches by ethnographers (Graeber, 2009, 2004; O'Reilly, 2005) and action researchers (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Reason and Bradbury, 2007a). Contemporary methods of observation tend to assume that the researcher will proactively seek a role of some sort within the communities in which their research takes place. This involves a fundamental rejection of classic notions of objectivity, observing social reality as if the presence of a researcher does not exist as part of the action (Angrosino and Rosenberg, 2011, p. 468). This also tends to involve a deliberate sharing of power between the researcher and the participants – at least the researcher intentionally brings the participants into consultation about how and to what ends the study may be carried out (Angrosino and Rosenberg, 2011, p. 469).

Bell (2008) shows that the action research tradition has been informed by ethnographic approaches to observation, especially the idea that the observer must not be objective or detached. She points out that Ruth Behar (1996) and Kenneth Clark (1989) – Cuban-American and African-American ethnographers, respectively – conceived of themselves as researchers that went beyond 'participant observation' to having a personal stake or investment in the research community. Behar (1996) used the term 'vulnerable observer' to depict the extent to which, in forming genuine relationships and emotional connections with research participants, a researcher opens oneself up to risk and vulnerability. Clark (1989) used the term 'involved observer' to depict the extent to which he was a longstanding member of the Harlem community that he was researching. In both cases, it is not simply the participation of the observer that opens possibilities for insightful observation, but the genuine connection to the place and the participants.

I built relationships with participants from the informal settlements as well as within the partner NGOs. I observed them as they went through the SCSVUP project. I observed the people living in the settlements as they lived their everyday lives. I visited them repeatedly. I specifically met with Motilal from Shakti Nagar on multiple occasions to hear about his life and to see what he did for livelihood. As the project advanced, and as my relationships with the NGO partners grew, I got more involved in the project work as well. Amrita and I wrote blog posts together under PRIA's name. I

offered my advice and assistance in learning from our experiences and following an organizing practice. I had many detailed but casual conversations with Amrita.

I consider my recordings of my reflections in my learning journal to be the primary source of data from observation. However, it is difficult to disaggregate observational data from recordings of dialogues and events. For the sake of clarity, I consider those sources of data under the facilitated dialogue and event analysis methods below.

Facilitated System Mapping

Facilitated System Mapping is a method described by Danny Burns (2015, 2011, 2007) for seeing the conceptual linkages between actors, issues, dynamics, and other systemic features of an inquiry setting. System mapping exercises are typically facilitated with groups of people who have been engaged in some form of intentional inquiry. Through reflection conversations and collaboratively drawing out tentative findings and observations on large pieces of paper, the group is able to synthesise its collective understanding of the focus issues. The exercise itself is a form of knowledge creation resulting in learning and the solidification of collective knowledge that can literally be held in common.

On two separate occasions I facilitated a mapping exercise with PRIA and Chetna staff. On the first occasion, 7 people were present (in addition to me) while on the second, only two people went through the exercise with me. The NGO partners had been living in the area and working on the same topics for several years, so they felt like they had a good, intuitive understanding of the systemic issues at work.

Even though we were collaboratively engaged in the SCSVUP project, the NGO partners tended to see themselves as teaching me how things worked. Ideally, in following a systemic action research methodology, the facilitated system mapping exercise should be preceded by a period of open inquiry in which the participants intentionally learn something new and bring their findings and experiences to the exercise as a process of collective sense-making. Since the prior project actions we had carried out together were not framed as inquiry processes from which the participants would draw for collective sense-making, the mapping exercise turned out to be of little analytical use to the NGO participants. Instead, it mainly functioned to introduce systems concepts to the NGO participants.

I facilitated the second exercise as a wrap-up reflection session with Amrita and Nidhi, the two staff people from the partner NGOs who had worked with me daily throughout the year. It was a much more intimate conversation. Again, the participants mostly thought of themselves as helping me with my PhD research rather than using the exercise as a way to critically reflect on the things they thought they had learned over the course of the SCSVUP project. As a result, this second exercise also failed to produce a map that was meaningful to the participants. However, the discussion was fruitful in providing space to reflect on our shared experiences. To be clear, Nidhi and Amrita found the discussion helpful, and it was an occasion to solidify our learning. The conversation from this exercise was transcribed and provided excellent insight into how these two NGO participants experienced the project. This was invaluable as data, but it did not result in a particularly useful system map.

This suggests that for the system mapping method to be meaningful for participants, they must see themselves as collectively engaging in a Systemic Action Research methodology. In this case, while there was an understanding that we were all learning from our experiences, the NGO participants saw the Systemic Action Research approach to be mostly relevant to me. That is, they saw me as intending to be more intentional and thorough about ‘learning’ than they were. For them, the action research was mostly about the action.

This method produced two table-sized, hand-drawn diagrams attempting to articulate the conceptual interlinkages of issues, actors, and processes at work in Raipur around informal settlements and the RAY policy. These diagrams can be seen in figures 3 and 4. Additionally, the discussions during the facilitated exercises were recorded and transcribed. The diagrams were analysed collectively at the time of drawing, though this did not seem very insightful to the NGO participants. I later consulted the diagrams when coding and analysing the transcripts of the exercise conversations.

Figure 3. NGO participants' initial system map, January 2013

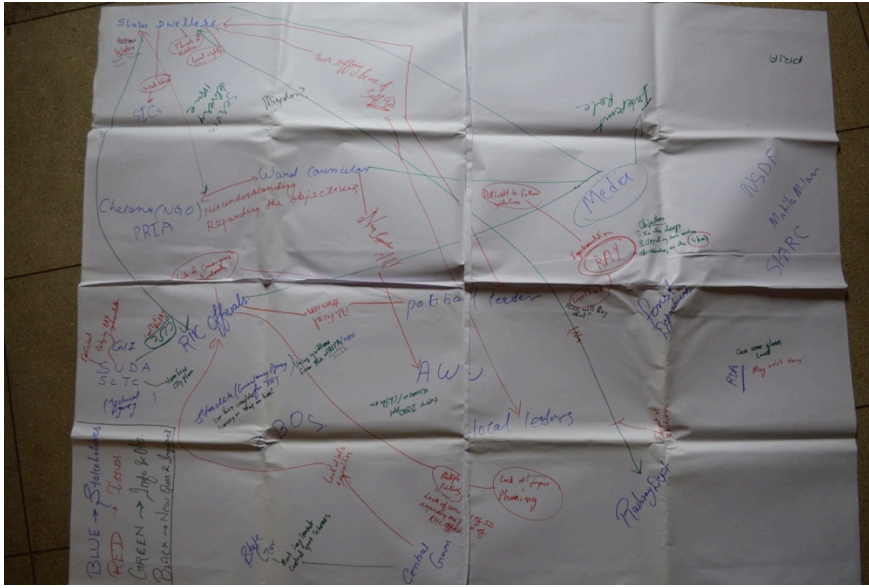
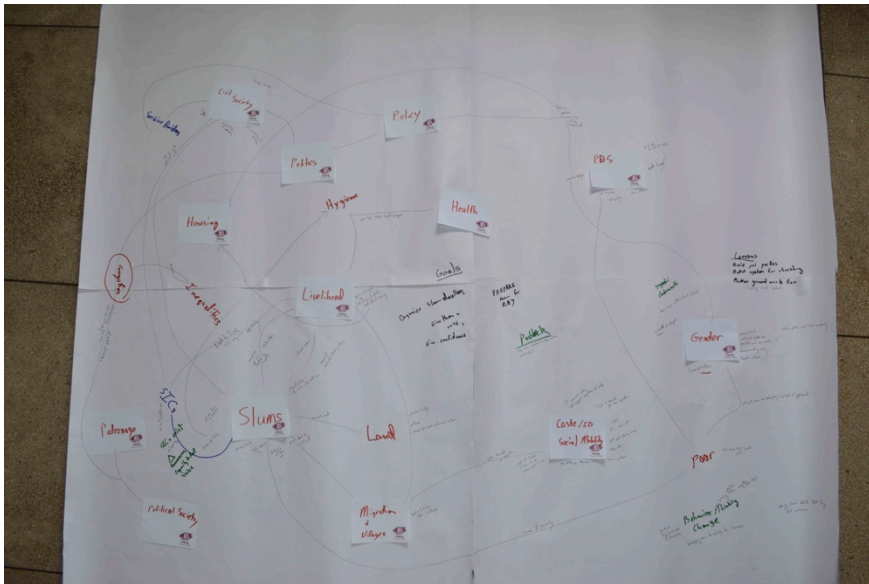


Figure 4. NGO participants' final system map, May 2013



Facilitated Dialogues

Given the incredibly rich relational nature of this research, dialogues were perhaps the most important source of data for this thesis. In developing my approach to facilitating dialogues, I drew on a number of other common interview techniques, including focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, action research facilitation practice, and life histories. My approach to facilitating dialogues was informed by focus group discussion methods (Schensul, 1999), but differed significantly as well. Rather than convening a group to discuss a predefined issue over a

predefined time, I met with groups of people with whom I had developed relationships, repeatedly over time, and with an open discussion agenda. My approach to facilitated dialogues was also informed by semi-structured and unstructured interview practices (Ayres, 2008; Cook, 2008; Merriam, 2009, pp. 89–93). All of my dialogues were open-ended, and I encouraged the participants to lead discussion on topics of interest to them, and there were typically issues of the moment about which I would inquire specifically. My approach was also informed by standard action research facilitation practice (Wadsworth, 2007) where the facilitator actively encourages deliberate exploration of issues and attempts to draw out meaningful contributions and critical participation from all the participants.

In many cases, the dialogues I facilitated for this research were with groups of participants – either the SIC groups, the Janjagran Samiti, or a group of the NGO participants. However, I include the many individual conversations I had with participants under this method as well, since I followed the same methodological practice. With individuals, however, I was sometimes able to probe deeper into personal histories and to intentionally explore the personal motivations that people felt drove them to take public action or participate in the SCSVUP project.

After the SICs were formed in the seven participating settlements, I convened periodic meetings with each SIC separately on multiple occasions. Additionally, all the SIC groups were brought together for a facilitated (by PRIA and Chetna) induction. By March 2013, the Janjagran Samiti had been formed with representation from each SIC, and I convened this group on 3 occasions for facilitated dialogue.

Amrita, Subhash and I negotiated a way for me to facilitate these dialogues through them, with them acting as translators. However, rather than translating in real time, our system involved me making detailed scripts ahead of time and going through them with Amrita, so that she understood all the things I wanted to discuss. Then, during the dialogues, Subhash translated for me in real time, so that I could follow along. The audio from the dialogues was recorded with a digital voice recorder (sometimes with video using my digital camera) and later translated and transcribed precisely. Occasionally, I would speak to the participants of a dialogue in real time through Subhash's translations, but this proved to be very awkward. The time delay between Subhash translating for me and then translating what I wanted to say usually meant that the conversation had moved on by the time the participants got to hear my statements. But through translating, transcribing, and reviewing after each dialogue, the

three of us became very proficient at facilitating the dialogues effectively. By the end of the project, I was able to contribute occasional thoughts in Hindi directly to conversations.

This method produced transcripts of 26 different facilitated group dialogues, translated from Hindi. I also collected over 40 hours of audio and video recordings, some of which were not translated and transcribed because sufficient saturation was reached, and the additional transcripts did not merit the extra time and financial costs. Additionally, I had over 100 conversations with individuals, which I facilitated according to the same method. I recorded and transcribed, sometimes translating from the Hindi when necessary, 25 of these.

Key Informant Interviews

In addition to the extensive conversations and dialogues with the research participants, I conducted 19 key informant interviews (Fetterman, 2008; Ogden, 2008) with officials and people working with NGOs in Raipur. These informants were selected by recommendations from colleagues, and I was able to access them through my connections with PRIA, Chetna, and the SCSVUP project. Many of these interviews dealt with general information about Raipur or with specific information about the implementation of the RAY policy. These interviews were not analysed in as much detail as the other dialogues, but they informed much of my developing sense of things over the course of the research project. They also served as a form of resonance testing in which I could get reactions to emergent hypotheses from other inquiry activities. Conducting the interviews also usually served to establish a professional relationship with informants for further involvement in the SCSVUP project.

Participatory Settlement Mapping

Participatory mapping techniques have gained great prominence in recent decades as methods for capturing local knowledge in ways that are legible to outsiders in a potentially empowering way (Chambers, 2006). In India, enumeration has been linked to practices of political society as a way to document membership of poor people in their community (Routray, 2014), which is often necessary in accessing entitlements such as ID cards and government services. GPS technology seems to hold promise as a way to facilitate participatory settlement mapping for communities belonging to Indian Alliance organizations (Patel et al., 2012, p. 19), specifically in the context of the RAY

policy. Rigon (2014) demonstrated that participatory mapping of informal settlements could assist settlement members in accessing inclusion in slum upgrading policies in Kenya, though at a risk of reinforcing local power dynamics and inequalities. In this case, official survey forms were simplified and filled out by local residents.

In this research, PRIA and I assisted one participating settlement (Gandhi Nagar) in carrying out a participatory enumeration and settlement mapping using GPS to document the presence and location of settlement households and the official RAY survey form to gather the information necessary to access the upgrades nominally available under the RAY policy. The GPS data was uploaded to Google Maps using a private Google account held by the settlement residents. This allowed their map to be stored digitally for safe-keeping, and it also allowed the residents to print a copy of their settlement map as part of their documentation. I do not analyse the geographic or demographic data collected by the settlement members, but I do analyse their (and my) experience carrying out the mapping and documentation exercise.

In-depth Analysis of Events

In following an inquiry stream through the relationship between collective action and strengthened agency, I collected data on and analysed two particularly important public events that were part of the SCSVUP project. In my role contributing to the project with PRIA, I helped to organize the two events, and I participated in each in a limited way. I helped prepare the SIC member participants for their roles as facilitators and participants in both events. I was present for both events, though I did not speak. In order to make sense of these events, I followed a method drawing on participant observation (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002) and event analysis (Olzak, 1989). Participant observation typically involves the researcher participating in an activity in order to gain more of an insider's perspective. These events, however, were not regular occurrences typical of any pre-existing social practice. My participation, then, was not so much to become an insider, but to be a part of an effort to change social practice. My concern in analysing these two events is to analyse how the participants carried out new forms of collective action and to discover what those actions revealed about agency in the process of change.

Meanwhile, Event Analysis, as documented by Olzak (1989), is a way of exploring events as instances of collective action. Traditionally, this has meant compiling data on multiple events using publications, archival records, and newspaper

articles. This kind of event analysis, typified by Charles Tilly (2008) in his book *Explaining Social Processes*, is more of a statistical technique for looking at frequencies and characteristics of events across time, than a way of looking at individual events in a detailed way.

My approach drew on the notion of analysing events as instances of collective action that could be informative about social change processes, but I focus in-depth on the two events in which I was also a participant. In this way, my method is similar to that used by Javier Auyero (2001) in witnessing and analysing political rallies held by members of the Peronist party's 'problem-solving network' in Buenos Aires.

The data generated by this method included about 4 hours of audio/video recordings of the two events, all of which was translated from Hindi and transcribed. In order to make sense of these two events, I also drew on in-depth conversations with individuals as well as facilitated group dialogues from before and after each event. These sources have been catalogued under the Facilitated Dialogues method. I analysed these two events in terms of the kinds of actions taken by the SIC member participants: new skills developed, particular rhetorical tactics employed, and reflections by the participants on why they chose to do what they did. This data revealed a set of people experiencing multiple constraints on their agency but actively pushing against those constraints, with uncertain consequences.

Table 1. Methods used within SAR

Method	Data
Observation	-177 typed pages of field notes in learning journal
Facilitated System Mapping	-2 system diagrams and transcripts from two facilitated exercises
Facilitated Dialogues	-Transcripts of 26 group dialogues from 40 hours of audio/video recordings -Transcripts of 25 individual dialogues from over 100 individual conversations
Key Informant Interviews	-Transcripts and interview notes from 19 key informant interviews
Participatory Settlement Mapping	-GPS data and map containing information on demographic features of Gandhi Nagar settlement
Event Analysis	-Transcripts of audio/video recordings of both the Media Meet and City Consultation

3.1.3.2. Social Network Analysis (SNA)

Recognising the importance of understanding agency in its complex systemic context begs the question of how the system can be seen. Drawing on the dialogical approach to working with complexity outlined in chapter 2 (Scoones et al., 2007), we know there is not only one ‘system’ at work. What is included in the system for the purposes of this research was bounded through a process of discussion and reflection. To more comprehensively understand agency in its complex systemic context, different framings of ‘the system’ were used for the different inquiry streams, but each of them attempted to ‘see’ the system in some way. In parallel to the ‘soft’ systems approaches used within the SAR methodology, I used Social Network Analysis (SNA) to capture and analyse the relationship structures aspect of ‘the system’.

In order to construct a data set with which standard social network analysis (Nooy et al., 2005; Wasserman and Faust, 2007) could be employed, I carried out a survey of social connections for residents in the 7 settlements participating in the SCSVUP project. I used Gephi and R (both open-source software) to calculate standard SNA metrics and produce network graphs. I then printed the graphs on table-sized

pieces of paper and went through a social network analysis with a group of the participants, what I call Participatory Social Network Analysis. Finally, I drew on Eva Schiffer's NetMap (Schiffer and Hauck, 2010; Schiffer and Waale, 2008) method to collect a second set of network data near the end of the project. Together, as I describe in chapter 6, these methods gave me the ability to integrate a technical network analysis into a participatory research to provide timely insight and validation of change processes. A summary of the methods used within the SNA methodology along with the data generated can be found in table 2 at the end of this section.

Social Network Survey

After SIC groups had been formed in the 7 settlements that ultimately participated in the SCSVUP project, I collected social network data from the participating settlements with the help of PRIA staff and my translator and assistant Subhash. Social network data is notoriously difficult to collect, especially in the context of a loosely bounded, nebulous space like a neighbourhood (Greenbaum and Greenbaum, 1985, p. 49; Hipp et al., 2013, p. 614). Older studies of urban social networks sampled neighbourhood residents randomly and simply asked them about their connections without any attempt to recreate or explicitly analyse the actual network – for example Greenbaum and Greenbaum (1985, p. 49) in whose study of neighbourhood relationships in 4 neighbourhoods of Kansas City 'networks' were merely a metaphor. More recent studies have abandoned data collection altogether. For example, Hipp et al. (2013) study the usefulness of network metrics in predicting crime by simply creating a simulated model network tuned according to census data. They explain their choice saying,

'assessing many network properties of theoretical interest requires a census of all persons in the city, as well as the spatial distribution of all of their ties, and therefore typical sampling-based survey strategies are not appropriate. Clearly, this is impractical for researchers' (Hipp et al., 2013, p. 614).

Still a number of scholars have outlined the care that must be taken when drawing meaning from social network metrics, and they offer a way of using them (carefully) with appropriate corrections for the nonlinear way that non-random selection can bias estimates (Borgatti and Cross, 2003; Coulon, 2005; Sporns, 2011).

What most social network analysts caution against is using biased metrics in further econometric analyses (like regressions). If the error calculations for a metric are

biased, the bias propagates unpredictably when brought into a regression to the point that significance calculations can become meaningless. In this research, I used the data to calculate centrality metrics, which gave insight into social change processes. I did not use those metrics further in regressions or other types of quantitative models.

The survey consisted of the following 4 questions:

- Of the people living in your neighbourhood, whom did you interact with last week?
- Of the people living in your neighbourhood, whom did you interact with in the last month?
- Whom did you interact with outside of your neighbourhood in the last week?
- Whom did you interact with outside of your neighbourhood in the last month?

For each of these questions, I asked the respondents to briefly and generally indicate the nature of the relationship and nature of the interaction. This allowed me to understand the different kinds of actors that were common in the network, which actors were important to the participants and for what reasons, and which relationships had obviously been forged because of the SCSVUP project.

I used a purposive sampling method to select respondents from the 7 participating settlements. Purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling (Saumure and Given, 2008). I surveyed 36 individuals in total from across the 7 settlements. Of those, 23 were members of their settlement's SIC. There were a total of 46 SIC members in the SCSVUP project, so the sample included exactly half of all the SIC members. The resulting graph contained 472 nodes (including nodes representing the 36 individuals surveyed) and 748 total edges (representing the total number of reported relationships).

The individuals surveyed who were not SIC members were surveyed because of their interest and participation in SIC activities. Given the well-known limitations of survey methods in social network analysis (Wald, 2014), I have chosen not to extrapolate from this survey to estimate metrics for the entire settlements. Rather, as I explain in greater detail in chapter 6, I treat the group of individuals surveyed as a complete network for the purposes of metric calculation. Thus, for the purposes of metric calculation, the graph contained 36 nodes and 83 edges; the 36 individuals surveyed and the reported relationships amongst that group.

Participatory Social Network Analysis

While the social network analysis that I carried out on the network data from the survey described above shed light on important aspects of the system, I wanted that insight to be relevant to the participants themselves. However, I did not simply want to teach the participants what I had found. I wanted to go through the analysis with them. As far as I am aware, this particular method has not been used before, and was an innovation for this research. I drew on the tradition of participatory mapping as well as the system-mapping techniques advocated by Danny Burns (both described above as SAR methods) to go through a version of social network analysis with participants in real time.

I had already calculated the standard SNA metrics for the participants based on the network survey data. I printed the social network diagram based on this data on a table-sized sheet of paper and used this map as the focus of a facilitated discussion. We used a visual analysis so that the participants could find themselves on the graphic depiction of the answers they had provided during the survey, and they could see how they related to everyone else. In addition to visually exploring the printed map, participants were able to mark up the maps according to a process drawing on Burns' facilitated system mapping exercise. Participants located themselves on the map and drew in new connections they felt were relevant. They also were able to annotate the paper network graph with qualitative information about particular relationships, noting how relationships may have changed over time or how certain relationships intersected with issues they hoped to address through collective action.

The result of this visual analysis was not quantitative assessments of centrality or positional power. Rather, it was a sense, among the participants, of their own relational importance within their social system. In some cases, participants noted how structural aspects of the network resonated with their senses of being variously isolated or connected at both the individual and settlement levels. It provided a confirmation of positive social changes that they were feeling, but also pointed out certain groups that were being left behind. The participants were able to use these insights to inform their planning discussions for future collective action.

This method has a great deal of potential for use in other research settings. However, in this research project, it did not work perfectly. It took a great deal of preparation and explanation for participants (some of whom were not literate, and none of whom spoke or read English) to grasp the concepts of social network analysis and

understand the data presented in the network graphs. While many participants were able to go through the participatory analysis as I facilitated it, others did not fully understand what was going on. Since this part of my research was happening as a supplement to the PRIA-led SCSVUP project, decisions about how much time and effort were worth investing in this method were not mine to make alone. I did the best I could, given the time and resource constraints of the research context, and I learned a lot about the potential and challenges of this method.

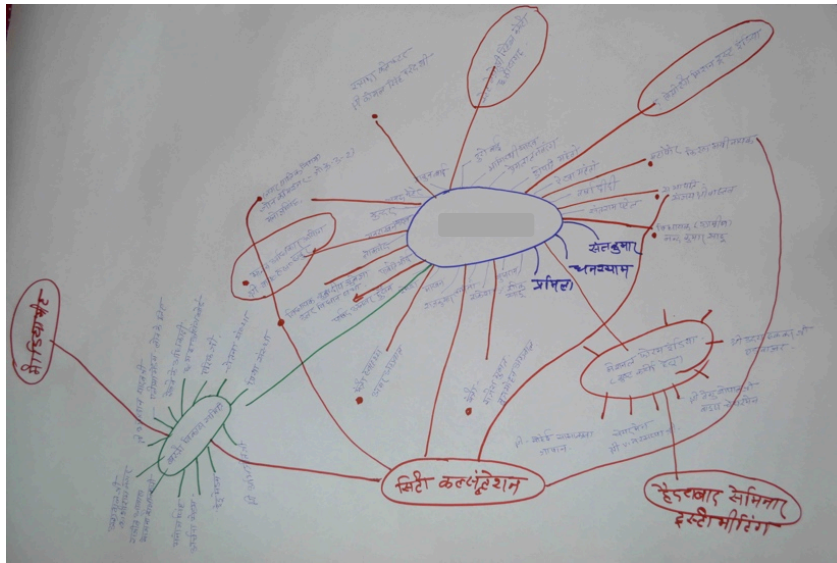
Participatory Social Network Mapping

Near the end of my research period, I made use of a participatory social network mapping method as a way of facilitating reflection on how the SCSVUP project had led to changes in agency by changing relationships. I designed a variation of Eva Schiffer's Net-Map process (Schiffer and Hauck, 2010; Schiffer and Waale, 2008)¹¹. This allowed a detailed discussion of the participants' social networks in real time, allowed the participants to keep the picture they had drawn of their own networks, and allowed a major part of the analysis to be accessible to the participants.

Participants were asked to draw their connections on chart paper with themselves at the centre: local connections to other neighbourhood residents, connections to individuals outside the neighbourhood, connections to groups or organizations, and events they attended in the last 6 months. People belonging to organizations or attending events on the map were then drawn as extending from those sections of the map. The maps, an example of which can be seen in figure 5, were discussed with the individual participants at the time of the mapping exercise, visual analysis was carried out with participants, and then data from the maps was combined into a set of three-level network data: individuals, groups, and events. Gephi software was then used for visualization (Bastian et al., 2009).

¹¹ My procedure differs significantly from Eva Schiffer's Net-Map process in that: I have included organizations and events rather than only individuals, making the networks multi-level; I did not explicitly consider multiple types of links between actors; rather than 'influence towers' respondents noted particularly influential actors with a red dot; and respondents were not asked to explicitly reflect on the goals of each actor in the network.

Figure 5. Example participatory network map



Because of the time-intensive nature of facilitated network mapping exercises, I chose not to pursue collection of network data on the same scale as the earlier survey. I selected 9 participants from across the 7 settlements, with each settlement being represented by at least one respondent. All 9 respondents were SIC members. The selection was again purposive, with the respondents chosen because they were the most active and available of the SIC members. The aggregated network from the 9 individual maps would be quite difficult to analyse according to the same standard SNA techniques used earlier with the survey data. In order to conduct a valid analysis of such data, it would be necessary to triangulate the findings with qualitative data, as shown by Wald (2014). I chose not to invest more of the limited research resources to follow through with analysis at that depth. Rather, for the respondents themselves, the mapping exercises and analysis served as an opportunity to reflect on changes (relational and otherwise) that they had experienced over the course of the project.

Table 2. Methods used within SNA

Method	Data
Network Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -36 Respondents -Number of important relationships -Content of relationship -Geographic distance of relationship (inside or outside of settlement)
Participatory SNA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Using printed graphs from survey data, additions and annotations by participants -Transcripts and audio/visual recordings of facilitated analysis exercise
Participatory Network Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -9 hand-drawn network maps -Transcripts and audio/visual recordings of facilitated mapping exercise and analysis

3.2. Research Process and Timeline

The 10 settlements were selected through a relational process. In the first year of the SCSVUP project (which ended in August, 2012), PRIA and Chetna carried out an extensive search of Raipur to identify all informal settlements, and they compared their findings with Raipur Municipal Corporation's (RMC) official list. While identifying all the informal settlements, PRIA and Chetna staff encountered a particularly active group of residents in Ambedkar Nagar. Later, the decision was made to work with a group of different settlements to form a local association in each one. This would be the second phase of the SCSVUP project, and began in September, 2012.

The RAY policy requires an extensive participatory planning process whereby either existing local associations are chosen or a local association must be formed for the purpose of officially partnering with the local government and a special 'state level technical cell' to carry out planning, implementation, and management of settlement redevelopment (Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2013a). PRIA and SPARC felt that, based on experience with participatory policies, there would likely be many problems with implementation. The local associations that would be formed in the participating settlements in Raipur, then, would be able to serve the function as the official association for the purposes of RAY. However, the idea was that, even if RAY

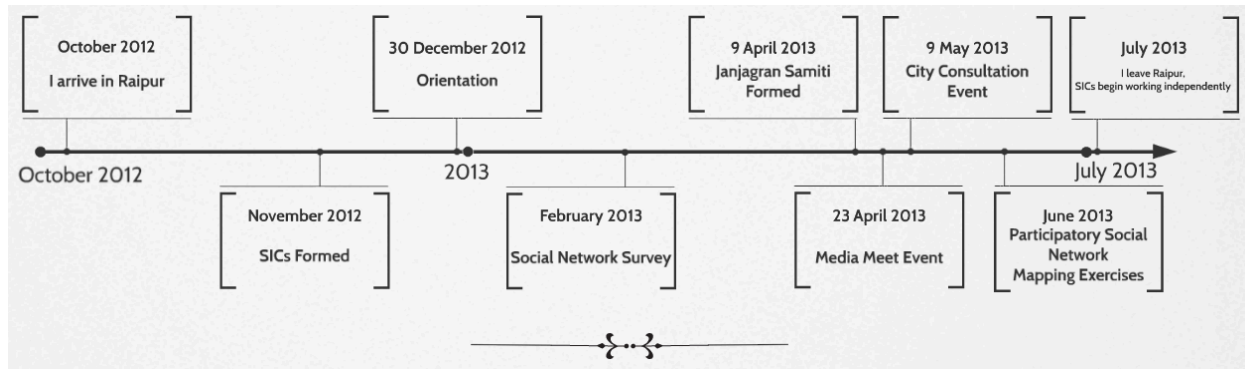
did not work out as planned, the local associations that were formed in the participating settlements could serve as catalysts for locally-driven social change in other capacities.

I learned of the SCSVUP project from colleagues at the Institute of Development Studies who had professional connections to PRIA leadership. I contacted PRIA and asked if I could carry out my PhD research in parallel with their ongoing action research project. I agreed to offer consultation on their efforts to achieve their project goals, and they agreed to assist me with logistics in carrying out research for this PhD. After an agreement was reached, I went to Raipur in October, 2012, just as PRIA and Chetna were beginning the second phase of the SCSVUP project - holding community meetings about forming associations in the ten selected settlements. This is the first of the significant events from my research depicted on the research timeline in figure 6.

One of the agreed conditions of my participation in the SCSVUP project was that I would provide training to PRIA staff in Raipur on the Systemic Action Research approach (Burns, 2007) and that I would help them incorporate a focus on complex adaptive systems into the project. Part of my approach to the research was also to intentionally leave open the possibility that, once I arrived in Raipur, PRIA's SCSVUP project and the requirements of my PhD research would not be compatible. Thus, the early stages of my participation in the project consisted of an open-ended exploration of how they could assist me in meeting the requirements of the PhD and I could assist them in effectively carrying out their project.

I quickly found my place in the city and established a good rapport with Amrita – the PRIA staff in charge of the SCSVUP – and Nidhi – the director of Chetna. Assisted by these relationships with the SCSVUP project team, I was able to carry out my PhD research according to the methodologies and methods described above. My research ran in parallel with other SCSVUP project activities, and my research activities involved the SCSVUP project participants in a participatory way. In spite of my affiliation with the SCSVUP project and the action research objectives of PRIA and Chetna, my PhD research was not synonymous with the SCSVUP project. This thesis documents my attempt to learn about how agency can be strengthened for people living in informal settlements, which overlapped with the SCSVUP project objectives and activities but was not confined to them. The analysis in this thesis is my own, even as I point out areas where I facilitated participatory analysis with SIC members and the NGO partners.

Figure 6. Research activity timeline



3.2.1. Forming SICs

For my first two months in Raipur (from October to December), I focussed mainly on understanding the place and fitting in. I knew that my PhD fieldwork would, to some extent, overlap with the activities of the SCSVUP project, though it was unclear exactly how this would shape up. PRIA had spent the first months of their project activity assessing the number of informal settlements in Raipur and beginning to engage with the Raipur Municipal Corporation and other organizations working on urban poverty issues. PRIA planned to begin working with people living in some of the settlements, but when I arrived, they were still working out their approach. My research was designed to be open-ended, and I was able to work closely with Amrita to carry out my research activities alongside PRIA's SCSVUP project work.

I developed strong working relationships with the core team of the SCSVUP project in Raipur, which consisted of Amrita as well as Nidhi and field staff from Chetna. Ten settlements had been identified as possible partners, and we began making visits. Together we made three visits to each of the settlements. For the first visit, Chetna's field staff would gather as many people from the neighbourhood as he could with the help of the women he had worked with previously, and Amrita would explain about the SCSVUP project and how we were hoping to work with people in poor neighbourhoods. The idea was to form a committee, which would work closely with PRIA and Chetna on an open-ended project. If the people at the meeting were interested, we would come back for a second meeting to discuss further. The second meeting involved discussing what the neighbourhood committee would look like and asking the people to think over who should put themselves forward. One settlement already had a committee, which agreed to work with us, but in the others, a third

meeting was held at which people were nominated from the neighbourhood and those assembled voted when decisions had to be made between candidates. In all cases, the committees that were formed were known as *Basti Vikas Samitis* (literally Slum Improvement Committees, SICs).

I was present for most of these initial settlement visits. The first time I was present in each settlement, Amrita made a prepared statement to the residents who had gathered explaining who I was, that I had come from the UK to carry out PhD research in partnership with PRIA, and asking if they were happy to participate in my research. This prepared statement included a translation of the informed consent form that I had drafted as part of the ethical review process at the University of Sussex. During the public meetings, residents had a chance to ask questions and raise concerns about being involved in my research. The formation of the SICs was completed by November 2012, which can be seen in figure 6, along with the rest of the major research activities outlined below. At that point, I began working more closely with the individuals who made up the SIC groups. I had further conversations with them in which I explained my research objectives. In these we were able to discuss the risks of their participation in my research as well as the risks of their participation in the wider SCSVUP project.

Raipur is divided into 70 wards, each of which has an elected representative, a Ward Councillor (or *parshad*) who serves on the City Council, a Mayor-in-Council system. PRIA had worked with each of the *parshads* from the 10 settlements before, but for this project, they had not decided to inform the *parshads* before forming the committees. It is not clear to me, even after extensive discussions, whether this was an oversight due to the limited staff time available for project activities or an intentional decision to prioritise connecting with settlement residents before approaching the *parshads*. If the *parshads* were approached first, they would likely have shaped the formative interactions with the residents, leading to different committee makeups.

One of the *parshads*, who presided over the three of the settlements – all in Hari Bhumi Ward – found out about this organizing activity and responded defensively. He spread the rumour among the residents that PRIA was trying to trick them into eviction, threatened them not to come to any meeting that PRIA called, and had his *goondas* chase Chetna field staff from the area. We decided to visit him in person at his office to try to smooth things over, but after a tense discussion, he threatened that we would be beaten if we ever came back to the settlements. He also claimed that our organizing work had so disturbed the residents of the neighbourhood that one woman had had a

heart attack, for which he would be filing an FIR with the police. After this incident, PRIA and Chetna decided not to continue working with residents in Hari Bhumi Ward. In the remaining seven settlements, the *parshads* were either mildly suspicious or indifferent. One tried to hand pick the committee members, but we managed to avoid it. The interactions with these *parshads* are examined in greater detail in chapter 5, which considers the relationship between mediation and agency.

After forming SICs in each of the seven remaining neighbourhoods, we scheduled an orientation meeting. At the end of December, all the SIC groups gathered to meet each other and have preliminary discussions. PRIA's motto is 'knowledge is power', and from their point of view, disseminating knowledge about the more than 70 government schemes designed to help the poor from both the state and national governments was one of the most important goals of the SCSVUP project. However, as I explore in chapters 4 and 5, the SIC members actually knew quite a lot about government policies. As the project and our relationships developed, the dynamic shifted away from the NGOs bridging the 'slum-dwellers' and the government to the NGOs becoming organizing partners with the SICs.

3.2.2. First Actions

During the orientation meeting and in subsequent discussions, attention came to focus on the *Rajiv Awas Yojana* (RAY) – the Rajiv Gandhi Housing Scheme – and therefore on the issue of housing rights. Shortly after the orientation meeting, the surveyors for the RAY policy came to Ambedkar Nagar settlement to enumerate them. This process was meant to be fully participatory, but the surveyors did not speak to anyone in the neighbourhood. They simply numbered all the houses with chalk and marked their locations on a map. The newly formed SIC in Ambedkar Nagar was outraged at the blatant lack of participation, so they went to the municipal corporation offices and demanded the survey be redone. This time, SIC members accompanied the surveyors around the settlement and made sure the enumeration was accurate. After this, the SIC members saw RAY as an important opportunity, and they decided to make participation in RAY a primary function of their SIC groups. PRIA, Chetna, and the SIC groups adopted a strategy of building a united network of 'slum-dwellers' who could work in partnership with local NGOs and government, or at least be able to put pressure on government to implement the RAY process, with the goal of ownership of upgraded homes in improved neighbourhoods.

In the month after the orientation meeting, the SIC from Ambedkar Nagar, under the leadership of an experienced organizer named Keshav, took an initiative to convene a series of meetings with all the SIC groups together. At these meetings, they warned the other SICs to pay attention and keep the RAY surveyors accountable when they came around.

One of the members of Lakshmi Nagar SIC, Amrit, was involved in the BJP youth wing and labour union, and he was interested in connecting people from other neighbourhoods to party resources, including an employment scheme and a scheme that would provide recipients with trade tools such as a sewing machine or masonry tools. At these initial gatherings, SIC members immediately began building relationships and taking advantage of each other's connections and resources.

It was at this point that I collected social network data using the survey method outlined above. This was also a period during which the SCSVUP project really started to take shape. In order to move around more freely and act more independently, I hired a translator. Subhash had been an organizer in the early 70s before going on to have a career as a salesman and businessman. He understood my approach to the action research clearly and soon became an active contributor to the SCSVUP project in his own right.

Part of the conditions of my partnership with PRIA was that I provide training on systems thinking and the Systemic Action Research methodology. I gave a training session to the research team from PRIA and Chetna on Systemic Action Research in January, and I went through a system mapping exercise with them. This exercise was designed to help them articulate their understanding of the major issues and actors relevant to the SCSVUP project, the interconnected and systemic nature of the issues, their vision for the project, and how they imagined the work of the project could make sustainable change. In fact, while the core team had a strong intuitive understanding that the issues of urban poverty are complex and interrelated, they had trouble imagining how the project would impact the wider system.

However, through discussions with the SIC members, a basic plan emerged. The SIC groups would be proactively involved in the RAY process, they would host a 'Media Meet' to tell their story publicly, and we would co-host a City Consultation at which they would be able to engage with the Mayor, other politicians, and officials such as the Zone Commissioners.

By early April, the SIC members had decided to form a central SIC committee for coordinating actions more effectively, so they selected two members from each SIC to serve on the Janjagran Samiti, or Committee for People's Awakening. At the first meeting of the Janjagran Samiti, I presented the social network data and findings from the survey. We went through my findings and a participatory visual analysis.

3.2.3. The Media Meet

The Media Meet was held on 23 April in the school in Shiv Nagar 1. Beforehand, we had two meetings with the Janjagran Samiti and others to prepare for the event and make sure they were able to tell the story they wanted to tell. Early in the meetings, the SIC members reflexively framed their story around the different issues faced by their settlements. Amrita and I probed them, pointing out that this standard narrative portrays them as helpless victims. Keshav, one of the main leaders of Ambedkar Nagar got very worked up discussing all the issues faced by his settlement. He had been politically active most of his life, and he was used to making demands. But after some discussion, the group decided that a more powerful story would be that of coming together across differences to improve their own neighbourhoods, to build partnerships with NGOs and government, and to make the whole city better. During the event, the reporters who had come did not seem interested in this kind of narrative and they kept pushing the SIC members to just tell what problems they faced. But they were prepared and kept bringing the reporters back to the story they wanted to tell, Keshav being the most vocal.

In evaluating their experience with the Media Meet, SIC members realised that there was power in telling their story in the media. They saw the way the reporters disregarded their story of empowerment in favour of the typical helpless victim story as a kind of pushback. In asserting themselves as empowered agents of their own change, they felt themselves altering a delicate power balance. They were conscious of the need not to disrespect their respective *parshads* or other patrons by claiming to no longer need their assistance. But they were also proud of having led their own press conference and told their own story, and the experience boosted their confidence in taking collective action.

3.2.4. The City Consultation

The City Consultation took place on 9 May, only a couple of weeks after the Media Meet. Again, Amrita and I tried to work closely with the SIC members to prepare. The Mayor, a Congress Party member, and the *parshad* from Shiv Nagar 1 (referred to throughout this thesis as ‘The Councillor’) attended, along with two zone commissioners representing some of the neighbourhoods, and a number of people from NGOs working on urban issues in Raipur. However, this time there was some tension within PRIA concerning how to handle the event. Amrita wanted to structure it so that the SIC groups would be sitting at the same level as the politicians. She wanted to facilitate a conversation between them where the SIC members could offer to be partners in making the city better, especially in implementing the RAY policy. However, the head of PRIA’s Raipur office disagreed. He insisted that the SIC members should only be allotted a time to put forward the main issues from each settlement; then the politicians would be given the floor to respond or give whatever prepared speech they had come with. It was the same problem as the Media Meet – the insistence on focussing on problems rather than the agency of the SIC members – except this time it was coming from PRIA. As a result of this disagreement, we only had one brief meeting with the SIC members to prepare for the event, and the results were quite disorganized.

During the Consultation, the Mayor arrived just as the SIC members were finishing their statements. Representatives from each SIC spoke about how they had formed the neighbourhood committees, how they wanted to help implement the RAY, and some put forward other pressing issues from their settlements. The Mayor addressed them in a defensive way. When one SIC member pointed out that if they were to be relocated to new housing on the outskirts of the city, it would be very difficult for them to get into the centre for their livelihoods, she sarcastically responded with ‘Don’t worry, I’ll send a car for you’ (Mayor, 9 May 2013, City Consultation). Knowing that many of the neighbourhoods had BJP *parshads*, she made critical statements about them, and the SIC members, not being adequately prepared, lost their cool and began to shout at the Mayor. Shortly after the Mayor’s departure, The Councillor arrived, obviously having been kept informed about what had happened. He immediately took control of the event, disregarding Amrita and getting the sympathetic crowd fired up. In the end, the SIC groups, which were meant to be unaligned with any political party, showed that their allegiance was clearly with the BJP. Instead of putting themselves

forward as empowered agents of their own change interested in a partnership, they came across as disorganized and dependent on partisan political connections. The impact of this event was far from clear, and it took a great deal of discussion amongst the NGO partners and the participants to make sense of it. I analyse this event along with the experiences of the participants and the sense-making processes in chapter 7.

3.2.5. Moving Forward

From PRIA's perspective, two positive things came out of the City Consultation. Firstly, a representative from the Railway Department (which owned the land under two of the settlements) attended, and this created an opportunity for PRIA to open a dialogue between the Railways and Raipur Municipal Corporation (which was in charge of implementing RAY). Secondly, we realised that other NGOs who attended the Consultation were also trying to organize with people living in poor neighbourhoods around issues of urban poverty. Until then, they had all been working in isolation. So in the weeks after the City Consultation, Subhash and I began following up these leads. A group of four NGOs, including the local branch of the Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR), began discussing the possibility of collaborating and bringing our respective neighbourhood partners together as well. About 6 months after I left Raipur, PRIA and IIHMR worked together on a project to assess the independent economic contribution of people in Raipur's informal settlements (PRIA, 2014).

However, at this same time, PRIA began to wind down its SCSVUP activity, according to the original two-year project plan. The central office in Delhi understood that if the project ended at that point, the relationships would dissolve before any lasting change had been made. They were frantically trying to secure funding to continue for another two years, but there was some uncertainty in the months after the City Consultation. Amrita got married and took several weeks leave. Without resources to continue the project, Chetna began to focus on other projects. This left Subhash and me to continue engaging with the SIC groups and try to help them reach a sustainable level of independent activity. This was when I decided to collect another set of social network data. I used a participatory network mapping process, which also doubled as a reflection on the experience of organizing with PRIA and being part of the SCSVUP project. By July 2014, the *Janjagran Samiti* was meeting regularly and independently. They had articulated a long-term vision for changing their neighbourhoods and extending their

organizing work into other neighbourhoods. However, elections were coming up, RAY implementation was stalled, and the future was uncertain.

3.3. Reflections on the process, risks, and challenges

I came to this research with certain research skills based on my background and education. I am a trained organizer, and I was able to bring that experience to bear on the research. But I had never been to India before, I did not speak Hindi, and I had never worked on this kind of long-term NGO-driven project before. It was a great experience to be able to share the resources I brought to the project, but it was even more amazing to experience such new things with the team of people I was able to work with. Nidhi helped me find an apartment to live in, and I built a small personal life with a set of friends I met through my housemate. Amrita was courageous enough to bend some of the strict social expectations put on her as a single woman to spend time with me and help me see her city through her eyes.

I got to see what it was like to be an organizer in Raipur by learning from Nidhi and Amrita. I also got to learn about being an organizer in Raipur from watching Keshav and Amrit inspire the SIC members around them and lead them on a journey from separate individual settlements to an organization capable of taking collective action and with aspirations of starting a movement. I especially value the lessons from Devki *didi*, who had spent her entire life struggling for the rights of Bangladeshi refugees who had fled during the war with Pakistan and settled in the Raipur area.

In carrying out my day-to-day activities, I found a way to balance my commitments to the SCSVUP project with the requirements of my PhD research. I kept a learning journal and reflected nearly every day on what I was experiencing and observing. My role in the project allowed me to be more proactive in working with the participants and planning actions than I would have been if I was merely an observer. And the fact that I was carrying out my own research, often independently, meant that 1) I was not much of a burden on PRIA resources, and 2) I was able to contribute new research tools and methods to PRIA's action research efforts, even when they were not relevant to my own research. For example, I made several trips with Amrita to Bilaspur, a neighbouring city where she was also responsible for implementing the SCSVUP project. I assisted with some project activities there, even though they did not factor into this PhD research at all.

One incredibly stimulating but also incredibly frightening thing about action research is the practice of remaining open to the unexpected. Before going to Raipur, I had a backup plan for striking out on my own and doing my PhD research a different way if my research was incompatible with PRIA's project. I feel very fortunate that I met the particular people I did meet, that I got on well with them all, and that we were able to do such meaningful and productive work together over the year I was there.

Another area where I was forced to be open to the unexpected was with my translator. After only a couple months working with PRIA, I realised my need to understand everything going on around me was putting a strain on Amrita. I needed a translator. I asked around through my network, and met with several people who spoke English. However, these people were all busy professionals and had no time to attend meetings with me or regularly translate and transcribe recordings. I placed an ad in the English-language daily newspaper for a translator and research assistant. I received about 20 interested responses. All but one of them were unemployed young men who had recently graduated with an MBA and hoped I was doing market research. The only qualified person who responded to my ad was Subhash, and I could not imagine a better translator.

Thirty years my senior and with two sons my age, he still interacted with me as an equal. He was recently retired from his own construction company, and he saw the chance to work with me as a chance to get back to the activist politics of his youth. He was not motivated by the money, nor did he think it was distasteful to spend time in informal settlements talking to people living in poverty. He quite enjoyed breaking taboos around class and caste distinctions by intentionally treating people living the settlements as equals. Over the course of the project, he became a dear friend of mine. I have since attended the marriage of his eldest son, and we continue to collaborate on projects.

Still, the issue of language and translation was a real challenge for this research. When I arrived in India, I spent two weeks working one-on-one with a Hindi tutor in Delhi for intensive study. Still, it would take me months to develop usable language skills. Further, even with Subhash, it was impractical to expect a translator to convey messages in real time during discussions. As I mentioned above, Subhash, Amrita, and I developed a workable system for me to facilitate meetings. Still, it was perpetually frustrating to have every interaction with participants mediated by another person. To ensure that my observations were reliable and that I understood what was being

discussed, I recorded as many conversations and facilitated dialogues as possible. With the minimal real-time translations I got from Subhash, the summary discussions we had after each interaction, then going through the translations and transcriptions with him afterwards, I had multiple opportunities to verify my understanding.

Another set of challenges were the relational and power dynamics involved in carrying out the project. The first major challenge was made evident during the conflict with the *parshad* of Hari Bhumi Ward. We had to take his threats of physical violence seriously. It was clear that he felt threatened by our efforts to work with residents of the ward.

Firstly, the reaction of the *parshad* highlights that interventions to strengthen agency (sometimes called empowerment projects) are inherently about power. The lesson I took from the experience was that one must expect pushback from entrenched interests when trying to create change. But it is also quite challenging to decide how to respond to such threats and pushback. In this case, I was bound to the decisions made by PRIA and Chetna. But they had to decide first how much risk they were willing to take that one of their staff would face violence. Then, they had to attempt to discern how much such work would put settlement residents at risk. If the *parshad* was willing to threaten us, surely he would more easily be able to hurt people living in the settlements who were likely dependent on him for access to resources and basic services. We were left without a channel for communication with the residents who were interested in working with us, so it was impossible to jointly weigh up the risks. PRIA and Chetna decided to be cautious and cease working in that ward. I think that was the best decision for the circumstances, but it was not an easy decision.

But it was not only in this ward where pushback occurred. I discuss this in greater detail in chapter 5, but in each settlement, with each *parshad*, we had to find ways to understand the power landscape. Importantly, I found that the residents of the settlement had developed effective tactics for remaining attuned to the power landscapes. Whereas PRIA and Chetna, as outsiders, found it difficult to understand the subtleties of action and reaction, the local participants could easily explain to us why people took particular actions and what those actions implied about risk. I found that, even as many social norms limited what could be said or done in public interactions, the SIC participants were willing to be remarkably frank with me about interpreting things that had happened.

In this way, I developed a practice of open and frank discussions with participants. Aside from simply making sure that the participants knew who I was, what I was doing, and why I wanted to work with them, I made sure to continually discuss assessments of risk around every action. For example, I discuss in chapter 4 the case of Gandhi Nagar. The residents there were being extorted by a local mafia. When Amrita and I witnessed the mafia leader taunting the SIC members, we were able to have an open conversation with the members afterwards where they explained everything. The members of Gandhi Nagar knew they were taking some level of risk in working with us, but it was important for them to carry on. Because we had built up trust with them, they were able to share their vulnerability with us, and together we could make an informed decision about what actions to take.

Finally, I want to reflect on the way PRIA engaged in the SCSVUP project. Firstly, it was clear in the beginning that PRIA saw themselves as a ‘civil society’ organization that should act as a bridge between people living in poverty and the government responsible for providing services to them. The project documents framed the issues of urban poverty in power-neutral terms. ‘Knowledge is power’ does not capture the extent to which power goes beyond knowledge and empowerment creates ripples throughout the entire power landscape. After experiencing the threatening pushback from the *parshad* of Hari Bhumi Ward, PRIA was forced to start paying attention to power relations. Amrita and I had many discussions about this, and about how to structure project activities to foster more equal power relations without provoking a threatening pushback.

However, PRIA, as an organization, functions according to a hierarchy. Even though Amrita was in charge of the day-to-day operations of the project, her manager ultimately felt responsible for the project’s outcomes. At key moments, like before the City Consultation, he would step in and take charge. In this way, PRIA was not capable of functioning as a unified organization. Amrita understood the subtle dynamics at work, and she advocated for strategically setting up the Consultation to foster more equal discussion between the SIC members and the authorities. Instead, her manager, not understanding the subtleties of the situation nor valuing equalization to the same extent, forced the facilitation of the City Consultation to follow more accepted social norms. Namely, this meant allowing the elected official to speak from a podium while the SIC members’ voices were held in check. Ultimately, as much as Amrita individually wanted to spend PRIA’s social capital on restructuring relations between

the SIC members and the authorities, her manager chose to protect PRIA at the expense of the participants.

3.4. Reflections on ethics

Because action research requires such a different approach to the relationship between the researcher and the ‘researched’ from that of other types of research, it demands particular attention to the issues of ethics and risk. Danny Burns (2007) and Joanna Wheeler (2012) offer excellent insights – for example, how to facilitate difficult discussions to how to perceive and respond to dangerous contexts. I sought to follow in their footsteps in my research, focusing time and energy on negotiating my relationships with the participants (Chataway, 2001).

Because of the time I spent and the relationships I developed over the course of my research, I was able to access spaces that are normally hidden from outsiders. My access was facilitated by the people I worked with, the people I happened to come in contact with, and the people I chose to build relationships with. This was something I could only control in part, and it had profound implications for the research. As such, I documented my encounters and decision processes as I entered the research context, developed relationships, and set out along the inquiry streams. Below, I offer reflections on that experience, with an eye to how my particular path facilitated access to some spaces while precluding access to others as the research took shape.

Power dynamics and the multi-dimensional everyday politics of life in Raipur were completely new for me. I did my best to observe and seek advice in order to understand as I acclimated to the context. I had to navigate those politics, and how I did so also had an impact on the research. Again, I could only partially control this process, and missteps and misunderstandings were inevitable. My partnership with PRIA and Chetna provided me with an important source of local knowledge and help. I documented in a daily learning journal my observations and experiences navigating the power dynamics and politics. This helped me learn as I went along and importantly helped to ensure action research quality. Action research is not reproducible or controlled, so documenting experiences, decisions, and results of those decisions was crucial in order to ensure quality research and valid conclusions.

Action research and the related building of relationships, engaging with people in conversations about important and possibly contentious issues, and taking action

toward social change (which might involve political confrontation) are likely to pose risks. I made every effort to mitigate risk through thoughtful preventative measures and self-awareness. I invested time and effort intentionally building trust with and among participants and creating safe spaces for dialogue. This involved further navigating power dynamics and politics, and my partnerships with PRIA, Chetna, and my research assistant Subhash were absolutely essential. My research targeted local leaders and activists for participation, so participants were often used to assessing and managing risks associated with action and social change. However, in some cases, participants were experiencing public action for the first time. Risk and the implications of decisions were discussed openly at every turn as part of facilitated dialogues. Participants made informed decisions within boundaries, which were themselves set through continuous negotiation between me, the NGO partners, and the participants from the informal settlements. Again, all these processes, discussions and decisions were documented.

Ultimately, I had to bring all of myself into the research. This meant bringing my unique assets and skills, but also certain needs, blind spots, and limitations. Reflecting on this as well as the unique roles, skills and inclinations of the participants is what Jethro Pettit (2012) refers to as positionality, and it was also crucial for navigating the power dynamics and politics of my research. Pettit suggests being up front about the ‘transformative intentions’ of the research. In my case, I was researching locally-driven social change with leaders and activists (as well as aspiring leaders and activists). From the original community meetings, those ‘transformative intentions’ were made explicit and negotiated, intentionally allowing the participants from the informal settlements to define the objectives and limits to those intentions. As such, I hope my research has been and will be able to contribute to improving Raipur and life for people living there. However, I am appropriately sceptical of my ability to discern what constitutes improvement or the best way to get there. This was something that had to flow from the action research dialogues. As planned, I was able to engage with a diversity of actors with wide-ranging perspectives and self-interests in order to make the process inclusive, though there were necessarily limits to that inclusiveness.

One major omission was the three settlements in Hari Bhumi Ward that were interested in participating but could not. I explore this further in chapter 5, but the exclusion of a set of people being dominated by their *parshad* limits what this research is able to say about how agency may be strengthened. In chapter 4, I provide observations about the everyday lives of some of the residents from the participating

settlements. In a number of cases, people faced such restrictive and overlapping constraints on their agency that they were not able to participate. Their voices and contributions were sorely missed.

Qualitative research, and especially action research, is inherently relational in ways that quantitative research is not – or at least is not required to be. There is a difference between doing research on people versus doing research with people (Heron and Reason, 2007). However, as with all human relationships, that distinction sometimes comes down to a very fine line that is often blurry. For many qualitative researchers (Angrosino and Rosenberg, 2011) it is important to acknowledge that it is not possible for the researcher to remain outside the social situation being studied. In other words, we change the situation we are trying to learn about by trying to learn about it. It is therefore unethical not to consider how one's presence and involvement impacts the research context.

Of course, this must be accounted for in terms of the ways it creates bias in the data. It must be accounted for when drawing conclusions. However, more importantly, it must be accounted for in terms of the ethics of doing the research in the first place. Contemporary qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2009, p. 230) assert that researchers must attempt to do no harm. But action researchers tend to go a step beyond this to attempt to do good – to try to make things better (Fals Borda, 2007, pp. 33–34).

As a (white) researcher from a university based in a former colonial power, I felt it important to consider ways I could avoid perpetuating a colonial legacy of privileged outsiders giving unsolicited advice not grounded in experience. I felt the need to be mindful of my outsider status and my white privilege. I attempted to remain agnostic about what constituted 'improvement' and to define that in consultation with my research partners. I made sure I was genuinely welcomed into the space before asserting a 'right' to be there conducting research. I made sure to genuinely build relationships with the others involved in the SCSVUP project in order to – at least to some degree – become an insider. This being an 'insider' to me means having an authority to have a legitimate opinion. It means earning a detailed local knowledge (always incomplete) with which to assert the legitimacy of my research findings. It meant being aware of the existence of a 'white saviour industrial complex' and being careful not to perpetuate it.

In my research, I made every attempt to ground my research activities in genuine relationships with participants and people across the social system (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p. 16). What is good or bad is inevitably contested. I find the safest

position to be to contest on the side of those with less power and privilege – not on their behalf, but in partnership with them. The analysis I present in this thesis is my own, however my entire research process has been mediated by those people with whom I built working relationships. In this way, in spite of my relative power and privilege, I was completely dependent on them – for access, for quality data, and often for such basic amenities as food and a place to live. I suspect that this vulnerability created conditions for me to be able to relate more easily to people living in the settlements than I was able to with many other people I met incidentally in Raipur. The validity of my research rests significantly on the foundation of these relationships. The fact that I have maintained an active working relationship with Subhash, Amrita, Nidhi, and some of the SIC members is, I hope, a testament to the validity of my research.

3.6. Methodological Contributions

By paying close attention to relational dynamics as well as relational structures, it was possible to trace some of the ways that individuals, relating to each other in specific ways, can result in emergent forms of collective action capabilities. The methods chosen for this thesis bring together facets of complex systems science to analyse change processes. Care has been taken not to treat complexity in a completely positivist way. Having been trained in the Santa Fe Institute tradition of positivist computational agent-based models, I have departed slightly for a more balanced treatment. I draw on both qualitative and quantitative data. This allows me to enhance my social network analysis with the meaning that participants ascribe to their relationships and their lived experience. Drawing on methods from Midgley (2000), Byrne (2005, 1998; Byrne and Callaghan, 2014), the STEPS Centre at IDS (Scoones et al., 2007), and Burns (2015, 2007), I have integrated my mixed methods to capture complexity in multiple ways across multiple frames of the social system.

Not only does this advance the use of complex systems concepts in the social sciences, it also sharpens the analytical powers of dialogical action research methods by providing a non-trivial analytical heuristic through which to interrogate social change. Complexity here is treated as a metaphor, but a non-trivial one. This thesis, then, moves beyond complexity as a metaphor to complexity as a rigorous conceptual analytical tool.

This thesis has been quite ambitious in its use of technical analytical methods in that throughout, I have insisted that this research be participatory. NGO partners as well

as participants from the informal settlements have been involved in driving the research process, collecting data, and conducting analysis. While the analysis presented in this thesis is my own, I attempted to maximize the extent to which data collected through my activities was meaningful and useful for the participants. I also attempted to provide them with new analytical tools for making sense of that data. My thesis makes an original contribution to the methodological literature because it shows that it is possible to make use of technical analytical methods in a participatory way that ensures both the analysis of data as well as the findings are accessible, meaningful, and useful for the participants.

However, this did not happen in a perfect or straightforward way. My research has also shown the challenges and limitations of making technical analytical tools accessible and participatory. For example, I met with SIC members on two occasions to discuss the social network analysis. I printed the network diagrams (shown and discussed further in Chapter 6) and used markers to edit and extend the networks the participants found meaningful. In doing these two exercises, it was clear that some participants understood the importance more than others. Some key SIC leaders, including Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar and most of the SIC team from Ambedkar Nagar understood the results clearly and used them to inform decisions about taking actions within the project. Others, however, would have taken much more time and effort to understand the technical aspects of the analysis or even to find it interesting. This poses a challenge for technical research methods: how much of the limited project time and resources should be spent pushing participants to engage in methods that they may not be interested in or that they may not easily master? How much is strengthening local research and analysis capabilities a priority for the local participants?

This thesis makes an original contribution to the methodological literature by serving as an experimental case study about how these trade-offs can be negotiated and how cutting edge analytical techniques can be integrated within a thoroughly participatory research project to allow participants to understand non-trivial aspects of the complexity of social change processes.

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the way in which I attempted to answer my research questions. I have presented my methodological approaches and outlined the

processes through which those methods were put into action. I also made the case that my thesis makes an original contribution to research methodology. I have drawn on a number of participatory and technical approaches to capture complexity in the context of locally-driven change processes.

My research was carried out in partnership with PRIA and Chetna, two important NGOs working to strengthen the agency of people living in poverty in India. I contributed to the SCSVUP project and was able to carry out my research activities for this thesis in parallel. I made use of the Participatory Action Research paradigm, which critiques positivism by insisting that knowledge is always social, partial, and contingent on the lived experiences of people. On top of this paradigm, I employed Systemic Action Research and Social Network Analysis methodologies. SAR allowed me to collect rich qualitative data about the lived experiences of the research participants as they went through the project. It allowed me to facilitate a range of exercises including system mapping (see p.90), which brought multiple perspectives on the systemic nature of agency together to create a more extensive picture of how issues fit together to impact agency. SNA allowed me to collect quantitative data on the relationships of people participating in the SCSVUP project over the course of the project to demonstrate that the project had restructured relationships to the advantage of the participants (see section 6.2.). Both of these methodologies were synthesized as the inquiry streams progressed and intersected so that, by the end of my research, the NGO and SIC participants were able to understand the impact of their actions (see section 8.2.3.). Namely, the participants adopted new skills, constructed a new vehicle for taking collective action, carved out space to reflect on and learn from their experiences, and were presented with a range of data and analysis that demonstrated that they had strengthened agency (see section 8.3.). In their reflections, participants tended to feel that participating in the project had led to greater confidence, a stronger sense of collective efficacy, and a sense of empowerment. Their subjective sense of improvement was validated by the network analysis, which demonstrated that what had previously been separate relatively isolated settlements had become a coherent (but fragile) unified organization (see section 7.2.).

The following four chapters present evidence from the four inquiry streams. In the next chapter, I begin with an exploration of systemic relational dynamics. This chapter draws predominantly on data from my observations and the methods of SAR. This chapter also introduces the people who contributed to my research and the

SCSVUP project. I have attempted to portray them accurately, with nuance and humanity, and to demonstrate the ways their actions (previously and over the course of this research) impacted their agency.

Chapter 4 - Relational Dynamics and Agency

This chapter deals with the question of relational patterns at work amongst the SCSVUP participants. I consider how those patterns reflect and impact agency. As with each of these empirical chapters, I consider evidence about the extent to which the project intervention to form the SICs in each settlement shifted those relational dynamics and impacted agency. As outlined in chapter 2, I take a generative approach to understanding agency in the context of complex social systems by bringing together learning about the relational structures as well as the relational dynamics. This chapter introduces many of the main participants and explores the relational dynamics. The subsequent chapters further flesh out the systemic picture with their corresponding analyses of relational structures and collective action.

In this chapter, I highlight some of the key rules by which people living in informal settlements interact with other people in the social system of Raipur. Then I explore the ways those relational dynamics impact agency with the ultimate goal of figuring out how agency can be strengthened by altering those dynamics.

Through short depictions of each of the seven settlements that completed the action research project, I show the kinds of behaviours the participants tended to adopt in their contexts and how those behaviours evolved over the course of the project. This, of course, includes changes in relational dynamics around collective action, but treatment of collective action is reserved for chapter 7. I observed that the participants from the informal settlements tended to adopt behavioural dynamics consistent with what Partha Chatterjee (2004) calls political society. From the vignettes presented and examined in this chapter, the participants from the informal settlements can be seen illegally squatting on public land; struggling to avoid eviction by appealing to legal, exceptional, and relational means; and taking collective action based on their affiliation with a population of 'slum dwellers' via which they negotiate the structural constraints on their agency. Mediation is an important aspect of this political society relational dynamic, and it merits further exploration. Thus I make mediation – including

mediation by *parshads* and political patrons, local ‘fixers’, as well as PRIA itself – the focus of chapter 5.

Agency for the participants had, before the intervention to form the SICs, largely been expressed through adopting this political society repertoire of behavioural dynamics. Given the systemic constraints they face, the provisional and informal nature of political society may allow people in that position to maximize their ‘provisional agency’ (Jauregui, 2014). As Jauregui notes, people living in informal settlements in India tend to follow the colloquial practice of *jugaad*, or provisionally rigging things to work according to the immediate needs and the tools at hand. In this way, though agency is often constrained by relational factors (the need to access resources through a patron, for example), these relationships offer a way to *jugaad* life to do the best one can, given the circumstances. The data presented here adds an important case study of how a particular set of people made strategic use of relational dynamics to attempt to maximize their agency – to make the most of their difficult situations.

Further, the main argument of this chapter is that the intervention by PRIA and Chetna to help residents in the seven settlements create SICs opened the possibility for new relational dynamics that could depart from the political society repertoire and increase agency. Some of those new relational dynamics were initiated by organising practise led by PRIA, Chetna, and myself. Others emerged through innovation and trial and error over the course of the project. This chapter introduces these new relational dynamics, but the full picture of how they contributed to strengthened agency will only be complete after the corresponding analysis of the contributions from relational structures and collective action.

4.1 Relational dynamics in the informal settlements

4.1.1 Shakti Nagar

The Shakti Nagar informal settlement was arranged along a railway line, between the tracks and a more formal neighbourhood. The land belonged to the Railway Ministry, and contained a pond, which, when it rained, had no place to go except into the shelters. This settlement was considered to be part of the larger Shakti Nagar Kushta Basti, but the *kushta basti* (leper colony) had been around longer, had more cement housing, and better facilities. The part of Shakti Nagar that formed an SIC group mainly

had houses made of poles with tarpaulin roofs, though there was electricity and nearby hand-pump water taps. Being on Railway land, they had not been included in the RAY survey.¹² One of the SIC members, Janisha, and her husband Motilal, explained that they had been pushing their *parshad* and the City to improve the drainage problems for years, but the matter had been held up because of disagreements over responsibility. The *parshad* had allegedly purchased the adjacent land illegally and then sold plots to others who built houses on the land, exacerbating the drainage problem. Below, in Box 1, I offer a sketch, based on my field note observations, of some of my interactions with Motilal.

Box 1. Visit to Shakti Nagar



On Friday when you were here with Motilal, the two of you sat in the main room of his two room house in plastic chairs, and talked about his life, and how he came here 30 years ago from Rajasthan, how his native language is Marvari, how he's struggled all his life, and how he married Janisha, who is a member of the SIC. She stood next to you brushing her hair in the mirror, unselfconsciously adjusting her large body and fitting into her sari. He told how his brothers live in nearby cities and they seem to have all found some measure of success with their own shops or decent-sounding mechanic jobs. His daughter made *chai* on a clay log-fed stove while you told Motilalji about your research and why you are doing the PhD, why you are in Raipur, and how you like living here. He told you all about his milk supply business, how the milk packets come in from Nagpur every morning at six and he works until ten distributing them. He goes back out in the afternoons to sell milk packets at his makeshift shop on the edge of the *basti* where it borders the new VIP colony. He moves a total of 15,000 packets every day. He told you he'll take you to the *dukkan*, which is kind of the social centre of the *basti*, and you can meet the shopkeeper. Mice would dart out from under nearby piles of papers and utensils and tools, then dart back under. You pointed to one, and he laughed and said 'Mouse!' You drank the *chai* and went to meet

¹² According to RAY guidance, all slums must be included in the RAY survey no matter who owns the land, but in Raipur, apparently at the special request of the Commissioner, all slums on Railway land were left out of the survey. The Nagar Nigam had an ongoing disagreement with the Railway ministry regarding the price of some Railway land that the City wanted to purchase.

the shopkeeper. While you and Motilalji chatted to the shopkeeper, little kids barely old enough to talk would walk up with a 1-rupee coin and call out the name of some candy. Older ones would come and buy other snacks, biscuits, gum, and sweets.

Today you arrive at his home and call him on the phone. The six-year old is standing at the opening with the curtain flap draped over her head like a hood. She stares at you with a kind of smirk that betrays nothing of what she might be thinking. Motilal comes out and you walk together over to another street where a tarp is blocking the way and loud music is playing. The tarp is bright yellow with a bright red tie-dyed circle in the centre. It's tied so tight at all four corners it can't be pulled back. So, you stand in front of it and speak pidgin Hinglish with two neighbours who live there, a carpenter and a cement mixer. Today this tarp marks the boundary between the informal settlement in which Motilal and Janisha live and the more formal middle class neighbourhood of cement homes and stability. The cement mixer belongs to a neighbourhood committee serving this more middle class colony, and he says that they meet every first Sunday to discuss community issues. He invites you to next month's meeting. Soon Motilal says he needs to get ready for the afternoon work, so you say your goodbyes.

The bureaucratic uncertainty around which government agency was formally responsible for providing services to the settlement meant that no agency could effectively be pressured to provide services (resulting in persistent lack of services). It also meant that no agency had a strong incentive to evict the residents (resulting in an indefinite but insecure occupation of the settlement). Similarly, they were easily excluded from RAY.

While some informal settlements had good working relationships (usually patronage relationships) with their *parshads*, others did not. The residents of Shakti Nagar clearly did not have a workable relationship with their *parshad*, and as a result they could not rely on him to provide resources. They could not count on his support to resolve their housing uncertainty or the flooding problem, nor could they effectively use collective action to pressure him to do so.

In Box 1, Motilal worked very hard at his multiple jobs in the informal sector. He woke early in the morning to distribute and sell milk packets to other shop-owners. Then, after a few hours rest midday, he would work another shift with one of his sons in

his own milk stall, which also held a pedal-powered sewing machine with which he and his sons did tailoring work. His whole family is involved in the business. His two sons helped out at the shop, while his daughters helped their mother. During the time of the project, they managed to purchase a brand new (low-end model) motorbike from money they had saved.

A common narrative exists among middle class people in Raipur that ‘slum-dwellers’ are lazy, that people take advantage of free or subsidized food staples to avoid the need to work for wages, and that men drink away all the wages they earn. While certain people may live that way, in my observations, Motilal represents the far more common pattern. He works incredibly hard, but remains in poverty because of a multitude of overlapping and mutually reinforcing inequalities and disadvantages faced by people in informal settlements¹³.



4.1.2. Shanti Nagar

The Shanti Nagar settlement had built up around a small lake, which residents used for washing, cleaning and fishing in spite of pollution. Failure to keep the lake clean and useful as a communal resource was just one manifestation of low levels of civic agency present in the settlement. Still, after a few community meetings in the settlement, residents agreed to form an SIC and be a part of the SCSVUP project.

One of the stated goals of the SCSVUP project was to ‘create a buzz’ around issues of urban poverty. This included making regular posts to a blog shared by all the SCSVUP teams across the participating cities. I was asked to assist Amrita in crafting blog posts about our experiences organizing in Raipur. These blog posts were meant to be somewhat provocative to generate buzz as well as to present the people of the participating settlements in a positive way. Box 2 includes an excerpt from one such blog post, about our experiences with the early community meetings in Shanti Nagar to negotiate the formation of an SIC.

Note that in the blog, we used the common term ‘slum-dweller’ to refer to the settlement residents. It has been noted elsewhere (for example, Björkman, 2014) that the use of this identity by people living in poverty and/or in informal settlements is sometimes strategic, in order to make themselves visible and legible to the wider society as well as to call attention to their relative abjection as a problem and source of shame

¹³ Consistent with the idea of poverty traps (Bowles et al., 2006).

for the wider society. The political connotations are lost in translation, however, so I have chosen not to use the term in this thesis in favour of more people-centred language: ‘people living in informal settlements’ or ‘residents’.

Box 2. Blog post excerpt (co-written with Amrita) about our visit to Shanti Nagar settlement

Slum Dwellers Disenchanted With Government Schemes But Ready to Organize

Many of the people inhabiting slums in India are illiterate, but that doesn’t mean they can’t understand what’s happening around them, and like you, they know when they’re being duped. In the slum of Shanti Nagar, in Raipur, PRIA encountered a strong reaction when meeting with residents to discuss organizing a slum improvement committee... Some of the residents are from Orissa and some are from villages near Raipur, but they all came here to make a better life for themselves...

On 19th September, they got word that Raipur Municipal Corporation (RMC) is planning to evict them to make room for a new fish market. After losing sleep over this for some time, the residents decided to demonstrate in front of the RMC office and try to find out the truth of the eviction plans. With the help of the ward councillor, they surrounded the RMC offices, but they were ultimately not able to secure any meetings or get confirmation about the eviction plans. The story of their demonstration was even published in the local newspaper, but they have yet to receive a response to their query.

It was in this context that we showed up, suggesting that they organize and learn about the new opportunities under current government schemes like RAY. The slum dwellers responded that they don’t want the ‘benefit’ of any government schemes. One resident said that the government actually creates schemes for the poor in order to rob them. She shared her experience of the government’s Smart Card program. This insurance program, part of the **Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana** programme, provided poor people with a Smart Card for only 30 rupees, and this would entitle them to health insurance coverage for up to 30,000 rupees per family per year in any government hospital and select private hospitals. This means that, in a typical slum of 500 residents, the government collects roughly 15,000 rupees. However, when residents of Shanti Nagar went to the hospital for check-ups or for treatment, they got a variety of responses including that the card was only valid in instances of hospital admission, that it was not for minor diseases or check-ups, or that the computer was down and could not process

Smart Card transactions so services would have to be paid for up front. Thus, the slum-dwellers of Shanti Nagar came to feel they had been fooled, paying 30 rupees for a card that would ultimately be worthless.

Another resident, Smt.¹⁴ Rukhmani Chaturwedi... reasoned that the slum was established as a vote bank and as long as it served this function, it would persist. No one, she said, will evict them before the next election two years from now. Of course, after the election, there is a good chance their homes might be destroyed without hesitation...

Perhaps these slum-dwellers are right to be sceptical of any government scheme that makes demands on them in the name of helping them. However, the appropriate response to a hostile government is the same as to a friendly one: organize to have a strong voice, be your own advocate, and hold the government accountable. This is where civil society can play a role: helping motivated slum-dwellers to organize themselves, informing them of all the details of government schemes and activities so they can make informed decisions about the nature of their participation, and keeping close contact with government to urge them continually to meet their obligations efficiently. Meanwhile, the government should not approach the poor as helpless victims. They may not be educated, but neither are they fools. They are fully capable of being agents of their own development.

The blog post in Box 2 argued that the residents of Shanti Nagar were capable of being agents of their own development, evidenced by the facts that they had mobilised in protest of eviction and were vocally reflective about the political realities they faced. They mobilised for action against the threat of eviction, but their mobilisation, even with the help of their *parshad*, was ineffective. They were cynical about the ability of any government policy to truly help them, but they could imagine nothing more effective to do than to make more demands on government. In spite of the strategic optimism expressed in the blog post, the residents of Shanti Nagar faced many challenges to organizing and participating in the SCSVUP project.

One woman, Sukanya Banerjee, was very enthusiastic to be part of the committee. However, in community meetings, she refused to speak for herself and instead insisted that her husband should speak for her. Within two months of forming

¹⁴ Smt. is an abbreviation for *Shrimati*, the feminine equivalent of Sri. It is roughly equivalent to miss (Ms) or misses (Mrs).

the SIC in Shanti Nagar, Sukanya dropped out of the project. I visited her home with Subhash several times, and her husband made it clear that he no longer wanted her to participate. He explained to us that his family was Bengali Brahmin, as we could tell from the last name. His parents were part of the generation that came to the Raipur area as refugees from Bangladesh. He was very proud in spite of living in precarious housing in the informal settlement, and we got the message that we were not welcome and that Sukanya *didid* would not be able to work with us anymore.

Another SIC member, Suchi, dropped out of the project after the unfortunate death of her husband. When we hadn't heard from her after an extended period, I went to visit her with Amrita, and we found out that her husband had died of jaundice. He was a day labourer (a *mazdoor*), and they could not afford to send him to the doctor when he got sick. By the time they realized the urgency of his condition, it was too late to save him. The community in Shanti Nagar gathered around her for support, but she was left without income and with children to care for.

Both of these women evinced a kind of relational precarity common in informal settlements. They were eager to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them to improve their lives, but circumstances outside of their control prevented them from doing so effectively. Sukanya was not able to make the decision to participate because she was overruled by her husband. This domestic relationship limited her agency to the point where she could not participate in a project to strengthen her agency. Suchi lost her husband and his livelihood base due to a preventable disease and was understandably too overwhelmed to make the SIC a priority.

The blog post in Box 2 relayed the residents' disenchantment with government schemes with the example of the *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana*. This was a health insurance policy meant to provide poor people with access to health care for reduced or no cost¹⁵. This was a policy that should have prevented the SIC member's husband's death. Instead, its failure encapsulates the relational feedback pattern of precarity – people do not have sufficient agency to access opportunities to strengthen their agency.

¹⁵ For information about health inequalities experienced by people living in informal settlements, see (Agarwal et al., 2007; Agarwal and Taneja, 2005; Butala et al., 2010; Kjellstrom et al., 2007; Kjellstrom and Mercado, 2008; Kovats and Akhtar, 2008; Osrin et al., 2011; Sverdlik, 2011; Unger and Riley, 2007; Vlahov et al., 2007; Younger et al., 2008).

Box 2 also includes the first reference to the common relational dynamic of ‘vote banks’. Smt. Chaturwedi spoke frankly about the fact that politicians could only be relied upon if they needed your vote, and then only until after the election. This discussion took place in the context of the RAY scheme, which was meant to address the uncertainty of housing rights. The residents pointed out that they were used to the everyday realpolitik of negotiating with various power brokers (including representatives of the state) for their survival, and they had little faith that this scheme would work as described on paper any better than the others.

Effective ‘vote banking’ requires the power to negotiate effectively through collective action. ‘Vote banks’ work when politicians can expect the entire settlement to vote as a block. Given the informal and precarious nature of life in informal settlements, ‘vote banking’ has become a major relational pattern through which residents are forced to take collective action for their survival.

The detailed knowledge held by the residents about the health insurance policy, along with their self-awareness about their position as a ‘vote bank’, is a challenge to PRIA’s ‘knowledge is power’ approach. Lack of knowledge was not what kept these residents powerless. However, this knowledge, coupled with a deep cynicism that comes from repeated disappointment, led to disempowering perceptions about the opportunities presented by such policies.

PRIA was motivated to carry out the SCSVUP project in large part because they saw the RAY policy as an opportunity for action. They were not naïve or even optimistic about the prospects for RAY being successfully implemented. Rather, they saw it as something around which people could be brought together for a new conversation and for new kinds of action. The residents of Shanti Nagar, on the other hand, tended to see such policies as risks – the cost of participation in the policy being a burden with a low probability of benefiting.

This blog post expresses the relational point of view PRIA and I were trying to advance through the organizing aspects of the SCSVUP project. Namely, we believed that people living in informal settlements could achieve stronger agency by organizing rather than mobilising and by changing the ways they related to government. Rather than mobilising a protest against eviction, we would help them organize into a committee that could strategically engage in a long-term relationship with a range of actors to avoid eviction. This would involve a shift in perspective from being the recipient of government services to being co-creators of a better society. I have used this

opportunity to merely introduce our approach to organizing, since this blog post expresses my thoughts (and PRIA's) at the time. I analyse and evaluate this approach in greater detail in chapter 7.

Here, what is important is to take stock of the relational practices that people living in Shanti Nagar adopted (prior to participating in the SCSVUP project) and the connection to agency. The people of Shanti Nagar had adopted some of the key political society behaviours: they played the 'vote bank' for their *parshad*, they attempted to access government services such as the health insurance scheme on the basis of their identity as 'poor' 'slum-dwellers', and they mobilised to attempt to pressure the government not to evict them. Nevertheless, as a group, they showed low levels of agency. Their collective action was ineffective at getting the attention of government officials. They maintained a relationship with their *parshad*, but they were not able to use it to resolve their tenuous hold on their settlement. Moreover, some people (women in this case) were unable to participate fully in the SIC group because of overlapping social factors. This demonstrates how low levels of agency related to poverty, informality, and precarity can lead to getting trapped in a pattern of relational dynamics that further constrain agency. This was the very kind of dynamic that the organizing of SIC groups was meant to address.



4.1.3. Gandhi Nagar

The Gandhi Nagar informal settlement, like Shakti Nagar, was located on Railway land. In truth, only part of the settlement was on land belonging to the Railway Ministry, and the rest spilled over into a larger tract of Nazul land, but the boundary was not clear, and this was enough to get them excluded from RAY. Most of the houses in this settlement were poorly constructed, some made of sheet metal and others made of cinder blocks. Most had roofs of either asbestos sheets or wood beams and tarps. There were two hand pump water wells, and most houses had electricity connections with their own meters.

Box 3. Selecting the SIC members in Gandhi Nagar

One November evening I accompanied PRIA and Chetna staff to Gandhi Nagar for the meeting to establish the SIC group in that settlement, as had been agreed ahead of time. We spread out jute cloths and blankets over the cement loading dock of the large government godown at the edge of the settlement. I was introduced to the crowd,

and before finalising the formation of the SIC, Amrita explained about my PhD research and made sure they understood enough to consent to their participation being part of it. Then she gave the same inspirational speech she gave in each candidate settlement: explaining that by forming a committee to work with us on the SCSVUP project, we could inform them about government schemes from which they might benefit, they would learn from and work with people living in other settlements around the city, they could push for their settlement to be upgraded and rehabilitated through the RAY programme, and they could build the strength of their community through organizing.

As she was coming to the point of asking for nominations for SIC members, two men pulled up on a motorcycle and started to make a scene. They asked who we were and what we were doing holding a meeting in this settlement. They started asking Amrita to explain everything again that she had just presented. They asked about me, and Amrita explained that I had come from the UK to work with them to help people living in settlements like this, and they immediately changed their attitude. Rather than trying to intimidate us in order to show their dominance, they made a big show of hospitality, stopping everything and asking me to stand up so we could shake hands and be formally introduced. This was another, slightly more subtle way of asserting dominance. The crowd started getting restless, and they were made visibly uncomfortable by the presence of these two men. Nidhi said to Amrita 'Make them sit down otherwise the others will leave.' She skilfully asked them to join in the meeting so that we could continue.

When she asked for nominations, the women were immediately enthusiastic. One nominated three other women who had sat in the very front and were obvious leaders (they had at various points turned around to quiet the women who had been talking and children who had been making noise). Then those women in turn nominated her. The four women came and stood at the front. The men were less sure. No one wanted to nominate himself, and when some names were put forward, those people seemed hesitant. They talked amongst themselves for some time, negotiating, discussing. Finally, they agreed to put forward one of the men who came in late on the motorcycle, along with another man who had been quiet the whole time but had sat near the front of the group. Since there were six people, the total number suggested up front (five or six), elections were not required, and Amrita just asked if anyone had anything to say about the nominees (no one did) and if they accepted them as the committee.

Everyone clapped in assent, and it was final. Then the newly appointed committee gave short speeches introducing themselves. The interrupting man went first, and was effusive in his praise of PRIA and Chetna. The others spoke, and all kept their speeches short.

Evident in the account of the SIC formation meeting in Gandhi Nagar is the dynamic of vulnerability to harassment and victimization by mafia or other self-proclaimed big men. The men who had interrupted the meeting and got selected to join the SIC remained a mystery to us for some time. The man never came to any SIC meeting, nor did we see him around the area when we visited, and eventually the other SIC members agreed to formally remove him.

Some months later, when it became clear that the settlement was being left out of the RAY survey, the SIC decided to carry out their own survey of the neighbourhood using a GPS device owned by PRIA, to make a data set with all the same information that would have been collected for RAY, and to present it to the Commissioner and demand to be included in the in-situ rehabilitation programme. During this activity, the SIC members took the lead, using the GPS device to record the location of each house, conducting interviews with the residents, and recording all the information on paper charts which I would later enter into Excel and Google Maps.

A man in dark sunglasses approached us as we were conducting door-to-door interviews in the settlement. He made fun of the survey team and told us condescendingly that it was no use to work with them. He asked sarcastically if any of them was running for *parshad* and if they wanted his vote. Then he left, and the SIC members looked visibly shaken, but they didn't explain to us who the man was.

After the GPS survey was completed, we invited the SIC members and other residents who had helped with the survey to the PRIA office for a discussion. They were very excited to have done their own survey, to see on a large printed map the outline of their settlement with all the local resources, *mandirs*, water pumps, etc. labelled. They were hopeful that showing this level of initiative would convince the Commissioner to include their settlement in RAY. We asked them about the man with the sunglasses, and they became quiet. They explained, visibly embarrassed, that the man was part of a local mafia. They were illegally occupying the government land, but this man was extorting rent money from them. He had also been trying to get himself

elected *parshad* of the area by trying to force them into being his vote bank. The men who had interrupted our community meeting that night at the godown were his men, one of whom he had attempted to plant on the SIC. They also told how several years before, this same group of women had formed a similar neighbourhood committee, but this man had sabotaged it. They claimed he had paid one lady from the settlement to file a false FIR¹⁶ against one of the committee. They explained that it had taken three years and all their money to fight the case, and in the end, the charges were dropped.

If this story was true as told to us, this man likely had connections to the police or a mafia organization. It seemed he was making sure we understood that he was keeping an eye on the settlement, and I expected that if the SIC became a capable organization, he would try to sabotage it as before. Yet these SIC members were adamant about pressing on with their work of making the neighbourhood better in spite of the risks. In the beginning, they were not very good at public speaking or mobilising, but they were enthusiastic and learned quickly. Throughout the project, the Gandhi Nagar SIC was the most eager to try new things, to take action, and to learn new organising skills. They developed a strong bond, and we would often go to visit them in the evenings. We would sit in Ragini's house with all the members (excluding the mafia man) for discussion about whatever had happened and planning what would come next. We would drink tea, and Ragini's dog would lie at our feet. The house was one of the biggest in the settlement, with a refrigerator, television, and space for a goat; but it was made of wood poles and sheet metal, had no toilet, and rats would often crawl around us during meetings. While the refrigerator, television, and goat were signs of relative wealth, it did not translate into (much) protection against the precarity of life in the settlement. During the rainy season, shortly before I left, Ragini was bitten by a snake as she waded through the standing water in her house.

The dynamics of interacting with outsiders is also illustrated in the vignette in Box 3 from Gandhi Nagar. The vagaries of social interactions meant that things happened without explanation and were sometimes impossible to understand as an outsider. It was sometimes difficult to know if someone was being helpful or hostile. Trust is difficult to come by.

¹⁶ First Incident Report – the official document which must be completed with police in order to formally proceed with any criminal complaint.

It took many months of working with the SIC members from Gandhi Nagar before they would tell us honestly about their struggles with the local mafia, and even then they were quite circumspect, clearly embarrassed at their own vulnerabilities and afraid of the possible repercussions of speaking out.



4.1.4. Shiv Nagar 1

Devki *didi* from Shiv Nagar 1 had a powerful but perplexing influence on the SCSVUP project. Her wisdom, political acumen, and organizing experience were great resources. However, for a number of possible reasons, she ultimately felt it best not to participate directly in her SIC. I referred to Devki *didi* with the respectful term for elder sister, *didi*, without thinking. I simply felt awed to be in her presence. She was not young, and she complained about the hardships of life and the difficulties that come with frailty and aging. But, she had a fire in her eyes. The stories she told about her life and work revealed a fierce courage and a deep humility. She had put her life on the line to fight for rights for her people. She had worked tirelessly for her community for decades, only to find herself still in a precarious position – without steady income or reliable family support, without legal rights to her land or home, and in a home that was small and vulnerable to flooding. Speaking with her in her home, she told me the story of her life and explained how politics worked in her settlement.

Box 4. Devki *didi* from Shiv Nagar 1

She had come to Chhattisgarh as a little girl, her parents refugees from Bangladesh. She had been organizing on behalf of the Bangladeshi community her whole life, and she had struggled for years to keep relatively secure housing in Shiv Nagar. She, her husband and two adult children lived in a simple two-room house with concrete walls and an asbestos roof. The land was *Nazul* land. It belonged to the government, and a large *nala* (or drain) flowed through the neighbourhood. The *nala* would flood during every year's monsoon and enter the house. She pointed to the shelving near the ceiling where she would store her belongings during floods. She didn't mention where she herself would go to stay dry, though there probably was no place else to go.

Describing her years of organizing, she said:

I have travelled all over Chhattisgarh, like Korba, Ambikapur, Raigar, Jagdalpur, and attended meetings. I have photographs of those meetings. Since I'm poor, I don't have

money, I cannot fight [in the election]. ... For so long, I was associated with this Tarun Chatterjee [former Mayor of Raipur]. We have fought together, went to jail. When the slum-dwellers were evicted, the lathi-charge was done by police, and we were taken to jail. ... We went to Nazul department of Nagar Nigam along with Tarun Chatterjee some time back. We went inside the office and took out the map. Tarun *dada* and we saw the map. We were tear-gassed then. So many people were injured. Some people were taken to jail (Devki *didi*, 15 March 2013, in-depth interview).

The first collective SIC action had been to install notice boards in each settlement with information about various government schemes and the names of the SIC members, who could be approached for more information. In Shiv Nagar 1, the board was torn down and ripped to pieces. Devki *didi* explained 'The best place is Shiv Nagar. But, the most danger is also in Shiv Nagar. In practically every house there are politicians' (Devki *didi*, 15 March 2013, in-depth interview).

While she didn't know exactly who had torn down the notice, she thought it was a group of young men who were Congress supporters. They had come to see the Shiv Nagar 1 SIC as an instrument of the BJP. Shortly after this, Devki withdrew from participating in the SIC activities. I still came to meet her privately in her home, but she refused to participate. She claimed that she was simply too busy with her domestic affairs. This may have been the case, but she maintained close contact with BJP politicians including The Councillor. It seems likely that she was warned not to associate herself with the SICs or risk losing her party connections. From her organizing stories, I understood her to be incredibly brave in the face of intimidation. However, she was also pragmatic¹⁷, and could understandably have decided that SIC participation was not worth the risk.

She also described the pragmatic way residents of the settlement struggled to keep the peace amongst themselves while also playing off all the parties against each other. She explained:

Can I tell you something? Our *samiti*... So all of us, before the elections hold a meeting...right here... So why do I hold these meetings? Because without them, there would be murders at the party level. They would take out their knives. There would be murder. That's why, to keep the peace, all these different *galis* about 5-6 of them, we have meetings. Who will we support this year [who shall we make the winner]. We see all who have filed nominations in our ward, whether they are from the BJP/Congress whoever they might be. We see several things like who has money, and then we decide who shall win. Or, we see that this candidate has more political power, then they will win.

¹⁷ For example, her prior affiliations with 'maverick' politician Tarun Chatterjee who had held various elected offices throughout his career under both Congress and BJP parties (Chatterjee, n.d.; Mishra, 2002).

We canvass and go around, see who is giving money. We are poor so whoever gives us the notes, we take it, from whoever is giving the money and work with them, but we have made the decision about who to support, and they are the people who will win. So, if that candidate is from the BJP, then we are the ones who will work. But, if the Congress candidate is a stronger one, then whoever the Congress workers are will work for them, and help us in our work. Our main objective is that we work for the *mohalla*. It all depends on who will work for our *mohalla* (Devki *didi*, 15 March 2013, in-depth interview).

After her withdrawal from the SIC, she had instructed another member, Lalita, to act as leader for the SIC. Lalita was a nurse and had no affiliations with any political party. As I understood, Devki likely withdrew from participation in the SIC for safety or political reasons, but she managed to coach Lalita, for whom participation was not nearly as risky. By the end of my fieldwork, Lalita told me that participating in the SIC had been transformative for her: an increased confidence, the ability to speak to powerful people without a sense of inferiority, a sense of fulfilling a responsibility to her community. Perhaps this was Devki's way of fostering leadership among other members of the SIC. Perhaps this was her way of maintaining an indirect influence.

In telling her story in Box 4, Devki mentions that she was with Tarun Chatterjee, and she refers to him with the Bengali equivalent of *bhaiya*. It's a way of situating herself in a larger meaningful narrative, of claiming legitimacy by being associated with a 'great' man, and also showing that she was well-connected. In those days, Tarun Chatterjee had been a Congress politician. These days Devki was most closely associated with the Councillor (a BJP politician) even though he was not her *parshad*. She valued him as a patron and took me to meet him personally. However, when Devki and I arrived at the Councillor's office, he made a show of being too busy to speak with me. This may have influenced her desire to participate.

Devki had an incredible amount of experience with organizing, mobilising, and taking public action. These skills were key manifestations of her agency – she made the cause of improving life for her people the centre of her own life and career. Yet, her example illuminates the constraints on her agency as well. She had worked closely organizing with powerful people like Tarun Chatterjee, and she had been an important active member of the Shiv Nagar community for years. Still, she lived in poverty with precarious housing, the constant threat of eviction, and in the shadow of a patron (from Chatterjee to the Councillor).

It is interesting to consider the way Devki has replaced Chatterjee with the Councillor. The Councillor was at that time the *parshad* of the neighbouring ward and was signalling that he was about to run for state-wide office. For Devki, as a local leader connected to the BJP, she was aligning herself with the Councillor as a way of positioning herself and situating her public work within an established political hierarchy. If the Councillor went on to be elected to a state-wide office, Devki's status would also rise.

Devki *didi*'s story is illustrative of the limits of the political society behavioural repertoire. She used all of the tactics to maximize her agency over the years, and even as she was a successful leader, she remained in poverty and precarity. To strengthen agency beyond these limits, new relational possibilities are needed. This is what the SCSVUP project was meant to explore, though Devki was only indirectly able to participate.



4.1.5. Shiv Nagar 2

Box 5. The SIC members of Shiv Nagar 2

This part of Shiv Nagar was separated from the other by an invisible ward boundary. But, since they occupied two different municipal wards and had different *parshads*, they saw themselves as separate and in need of separate SICs. Where Shiv Nagar 1 was filled with 'politicians', the members of Shiv Nagar 2's SIC were largely without strong connections to a party or party patrons. Of course, they were used to visiting their *parshad*, the Councillor, but they were not experienced in activism.

In Shiv Nagar 2, only two of the SIC members were able to devote much time to actively being involved in the SCSVUP project. Vinika managed the school building and was quite connected to everyone in the settlement. She was happy to participate, but was very busy, so she rarely attended meetings or events that happened outside of her neighbourhood. Shomita had three children, the youngest of whom was just old enough to start school. Her husband had recently not been able to find much work, so she wanted to use her new freedom (the part of the day when the children were out of her care) to help the community and try to connect to people through whom she could find part-time paid work to supplement the family income. She was very enthusiastic about participating in the SIC, but she was inexperienced and had few useful contacts. In a way, she was exactly the kind of person the SCSVUP project was meant to target – an

everyday person who isn't already a leader, but who wants to become a leader and needs help.

Shomita explained that as a woman, she faced difficulties in participating in organizing work, especially regarding transportation. But, at the same time, as a woman who did not work, she had time to participate, whereas her husband or other men would not have time. She explained:

Yes, we face problems [getting to meetings]. We go because of our own desire. I want to have information, to learn things. But, no, it isn't a big problem. I stay at home, so I can reach there. But, there is a little problem of money, since we've only one earning member. After building the house, our financial status declined since all the money was spent on the building and furniture. In fact, I'm looking for a job, so I can help out financially. It has been 12 years since we got married, and not a single time did he [her husband] tell me to go and work. Not a single time (Shomita, 18 April 2013, in-depth interview).

The two main problems in her settlement that she was hoping to address were lack of water access and the lack of a decent road for getting into and out of the area. Shortly after forming the SICs, Shomita helped a neighbour get a water tap installed with the help of Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar. She explained how he helped navigate the bureaucracy and deal with the contractors:

I called Amrit on the phone and told him that the contractor came, and he's arranging for the water connection, but he's asking for money. These people are poor, so they can't pay. So what do we do? Then he [Amrit] said, 'Ok, you can pay it later. When the contractor comes I will talk to him on the phone' (Shomita, 18 April 2013, in-depth interview).

Shomita was also concerned that the rest of the SIC members were not taking their responsibilities seriously, and she was being left alone, unable to really get anything done for the community. She explained:

I tried many times before. I've told [staff from Chetna] that I'm alone from this side. The others belong to the Oriya [part of the settlement]. So, I told him to elect one member from each lane. Like one from this lane, one from the next lane. Like this, so that the people elected will belong to the same area. I'm alone on this side. That's why I brought a new person with me, a man. There are other people, other ladies too who would like to join us. Now the people of the basti taunt us. We have not even conducted a single meeting (Shomita, 18 April 2013, in-depth interview).

Later she added:

I really want to work. I don't need any money from this. I only want some positive recognition, that people will say there is a woman in this basti who works for the well-being of this basti. There is another woman here, Vinika, who has long been known. People know her. I want that kind of recognition. There are many works pending in the

basti, so I have to work properly. If we can accomplish a single work successfully, the people will know us (Shomita, 18 April 2013, in-depth interview).

When only a couple of people were invested in the SIC, Shomita was discouraged about the ability of the SIC to have an impact (their efficacy). However, because of their connections to the active members from the other settlements, they took encouragement and benefited from being a part of the project even without the support of their neighbours. This in turn opened the possibility of demonstrating to the neighbours that participation could be effective.

While Shomita mentioned wanting to make connections in order to make more money, she earnestly wanted to be a part of something bigger than her family's livelihood. She wanted to make her settlement better and make her society better. She saw being part of the SIC – even if the other SIC members in her settlement were not very active – as a way to get new experiences, new skills, and new connections, and therefore to achieve her vision of being able to make a difference. In Box 5, she is expressing her desire for a “public life”.



4.1.6. Lakshmi Nagar

Lakshmi Nagar was a relatively small and homogeneous settlement that, like the others in this study, had existed for several decades. In spite of this, there was a relatively low level of shared leadership. Several residents were affiliated with the BJP and the BJP labour organization, and they were actively engaged in managing the affairs and concerns of the people living in the settlement. But, they did not see it as possible (nor worthwhile to try) to make leaders out of the common people of the settlement. The main leader from this settlement who became a member of the SIC was Amrit.

Box 6. Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar

Amrit worked as a ‘fixer’ for the *Shram Kalyan Mandal* (Labour Welfare Board), a State-level body formed by the BJP-led State Government and placed under the State’s Labour Department. He had been active for many years in BJP politics and

worked directly with Jitesh *bhai*, the *Mandal Adhyaksh*¹⁸ (Board Chairman) of the Labour Welfare Board. He was also affiliated with The Councillor and active in the BJP *Yuva Morcha*, the BJP's youth wing. He was clear about needing to balance his connections to the political party and his connection to the SIC. He believed that the SIC groups should be non-political. In preparing to tell the story to the media, he explained how he viewed the SIC endeavour:

We can discuss things like how the Basti Vikas Samiti (SIC) is formed to make people self-aware. Some people are there in the basti who want to work in this regard. I can't do it alone, so I must bring them together. We team up ourselves and see what problems are there and solve them. For the people, it's not possible for everyone to go to the required place and solve the problem... We don't want to involve politics here (Amrit, 17 April 2013, facilitated reflection discussion).

Yet for all the intentions to make the SICs non-political, he conceded that it was necessary to have connections: 'Yes there is politics in the SICs, in that those we speak favourably of will be good to us' (Amrit, 17 April 2013, facilitated reflection discussion).

When asked if his party connections were aware of the SIC groups and if they saw them as a threat, he explained that yes, the party people were aware. He had explained that since he was responsible for organizing the distribution of *Shramik* (Labour) Cards and tools like sewing machines and masonry kits through the *Shram Kalyan Mandal*, the SIC groups would facilitate the distribution and potentially strengthen the party as well. In this way, the party people were supportive of his efforts. However, at some point, if the SICs would try to assert their independence and work for their own agenda, at that point they could be seen as a threat.

From the beginning of our work together, it was clear that Amrit was going to be an important leader for the SIC groups. I went to visit him in his home several times to understand his vision, his constraints, and his tactics. While Amrita and I had to urge many of the SIC members to participate, to take responsibility and ownership for their SIC work, and to see new possibilities for taking collective action, Amrit was naturally driven and experienced, and we treated him as a fellow organizer even though there were differences of opinion between him and us.

¹⁸ The term *mandal adhyaksh* is used generally to indicate the leader of an organization. In some cases, as with the Labour Welfare Board, it is a specific position, but in other cases, it's less clear whether the term refers to an official title.

Amrit was not hopeful about the prospect of the common people transforming into leaders and shaping their own futures. For him, there were leaders and there were followers. In order to help the settlement, strong leadership was needed, but this should come from carefully chosen people who already had leadership skills and understood how to work in a hierarchical organisation. Perhaps this was his view because he was used to working in the BJP party hierarchy, perhaps it came from disillusionment from years of public service, or perhaps he was simply aiming to consolidate his own authority as leader in this settlement to avoid creating potential rivals.

Discussing how to organize the functioning of the SICs, he suggested: 'We will make posts like the President, Vice President, Secretary. Like in the BJP, they have national levels, state levels, district levels, and zonal levels. Like Raipur is at the district level, and six members per zone may be elected'. He went on to describe a coordinator post, which would coordinate activity and communication between SICs: 'He should be someone who understands the whole thing, and should wait for your call. He should understand what benefits he and the slum people will get from this. Up to now, we couldn't make the people understand about the importance' (Amrit, 17 April 2013, facilitated reflection discussion).

He had a vision of expanding from seven settlements to 14, creating more SICs and ultimately covering the whole city. When asked how he thought coordination could be kept while expanding, he said:

You need not tell Keshav [from Ambedkar Nagar] and me about this, the district officers should be given responsibility over the zones. They should keep an eye on what work is done in the ward. Later on, we'll make them the coordinator of the ward. He should be responsible for all the work done in the ward. He will be the in-charge. He should take care of the things. He should be responsible for the settlement of issues (17 April 2013, facilitated reflection discussion).

After the Janjagran Samiti was formed, Amrit would attend the meetings alone. Even though every SIC had agreed to name two members to join the Janjagran Samiti to coordinate action between the SICs, no one else from the Lakshmi Nagar SIC was named. We encouraged Amrit to bring some of the other members along to meetings, and asked him what he thought about fostering leadership in the other members. He explained:

As time passes, new people will join. Some will quit. You can't really force somebody to do this work. They should have their own will to do this. I will lead them. Everybody has his own work. Nobody roams freely. So, if they give their time after work, this will be considered service to the society... I tried to bring people like [the other SIC members]

but they are not particularly interested. Sometimes they fall asleep (Amrit, 17 April 2013, facilitated reflection discussion).

As discussed in chapter 2, mediation is a particularly important process for people living in informal settlements, and one type of mediator who has been observed in such contexts is the local level ‘fixer’. ‘Fixers’ broker relations between people living in informal settlements and powerful actors like politicians. Amrit clearly fell into this category.

Though we never discussed it explicitly, Amrit was almost certainly paid for his work by the BJP. That is why he had time to participate in SIC activities during the day. He saw the SIC work as his BJP work, or at least as an extension of his BJP work. It was clear that he sincerely wanted to help the people of his settlement and the others, even as he sincerely wanted to be one of the main leaders. It is important to note that ‘fixers’ like Amrit have self-interests which may seem selfish or self-serving while at the same time, they may display genuine concern for the welfare of others and the wellbeing of their communities. There may be times when the two motivations are in conflict, but ‘fixers’ must not be thought of as simple caricatures of calculating middle men.

It is useful to examine Amrit’s assessment of the power landscape and the politics of the SICs in detail. His explanation of the delicately balanced power landscape, and how organizing SIC groups would alter it, is telling. He explicitly acknowledged that the SICs were meant to generate ‘bottom-up’ power; they were meant to strengthen the agency of the participants. Further, this power, in order to be efficacious, would need to engage with formal politics at some point, since local political parties are the gatekeepers of nearly all social resources for people living in informal settlements (Veron et al., 2003, p. 23). The strategy adopted by the SICs to navigate this constraint was to project their organizing activity as ‘non-political’. By this, they did not mean that it was apolitical, nor that it was explicitly nonpartisan, but that it was political in a way that intentionally would not seem threatening to any political party.

It is also important to highlight Amrit’s approach to leadership and his ideas about how one should behave as a ‘fixer’. He had no illusions about the likelihood of turning everyday people into effective leaders, and in fact displayed a kind of detached cynicism. Even about the other SIC members from his settlement, he says that

‘sometimes they fall asleep’. He did not push people to grow as leaders. Rather, he seemed to quite prefer if they simply ‘slept’ and allowed him and other people who had already demonstrated their leadership abilities (through work with the party) to carry on working for the benefit of the community.



4.1.7. Ambedkar Nagar

The last participating settlement was Ambedkar Nagar. Like Lakshmi Nagar, Ambedkar Nagar was actively engaged in political and social issues, but in contrasting ways. In Ambedkar Nagar, the community was made up of several diverse groups that had coexisted together for decades. There were tensions between Hindus and Muslims, between BJP and Congress supporters, as well as other fault lines. However, there was also a unity and active practice of communication across differences that was quite unique. There were many leaders, and they saw it as their job to make other residents of the settlement into leaders as well.

Box 7. Keshav and the Ambedkar Nagar SIC

Keshav was part of the group that had been relocated to this area 25 years or so prior, and he had helped build this settlement. He had a *patta*, or a 30-year right to live on the land, though many people had moved into the settlement over the years and constructed their own homes without such authority. A former arm wrestling champion and body builder, he loved to take the spotlight whenever possible, even as he spoke with an air of humility. He would mention his connection to the Collector by telling about how he had been to visit him on behalf of a neighbour. He would mention his history with the BJP – he had previously been responsible for party outreach to a large section of the city – in order to show how hard he worked on behalf of the community.

In Ambedkar Nagar, the SIC election meeting was a much more dramatic affair than in the other settlements. The meeting was held in the large courtyard of the settlement’s school and *anganwaadi*. It started after dark, spotlights were arranged, and a PA system was used so that everyone in the large crowd could hear as candidates gave speeches about how this new committee would work for the benefit of the people and allow them to take more effective collective action. Keshav and others gave impassioned speeches, and the event was reported in a local newspaper.

After forming the SIC, Keshav rebuked the other members for relying on him too much. He explained how much time he put into serving the community – taking a

group of people to visit the Collector, the Raipur Development Authority, and the Commissioner. At an early meeting of Ambedkar Nagar's SIC, in which they explored and discussed their social networks, he said 'This is the reason I didn't come yesterday [to the originally scheduled meeting]. At least four other people could have attended the meeting, apart from me. They should feel that in the absence of *bhaiya*¹⁹ they can also take action' (Keshav, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

Still, he touted his connections to powerful patrons who could help him and the community:

I have a direct connection with Jitesh bhai [Chairman (or mandal adhyaksh) of the BJP Labour Welfare Board] and the other members of that committee. Whoever the members are, they are known to me. Pramod Bhatt, Tejram Sahu; we work together with all of these members (Keshav, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

Later he added:

With the RDA [Raipur Development Authority] we have a connection, but not with the Railway department. I know Prafull Vishwakarma and Sunil Soni [ex-mayor and current Chairman of the RDA]. Ratan Daga is also a member of RDA. I know Tarun Prakash Sinha [the Commissioner]. We have a very good relationship (Keshav, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

Another SIC member added:

We have a relationship with Nagar Nigam [the Municipality], the mayor, the RDA. We have that level of relationship with them that whenever we want we can meet with them... Keshav was mandal adhyaksh previously [not clear of which organization or in what capacity he was 'board chairman'], and he has connections with all political people. I was mandal adhyaksh in the Jati Morcha [an ethnic-based social advancement organization]. I was a scheduled caste Jati association advisor member from Congress in Delhi (Ambedkar Nagar SIC member, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

Being well connected, they wanted to start meeting with the other SIC groups and begin connecting them directly to powerful people. They wanted to foster leadership in the other settlements and then step back; they did not want to become permanent brokers for the other settlements. Dinesh, another very engaged SIC member, explained how he saw Ambedkar Nagar's role in the SCSVUP project:

¹⁹ He is referring to himself using the deferential term for 'big brother' that is often used as a courtesy when seeking assistance from someone.

We are exactly in the middle of the thing, and thereby very close to the others. We need to increase these relationships gradually. The moment the word Ambedkar Nagar comes, they visualize us. A few people are already connected to the power. There are still some people who also want to connect to the power area. Those who want to get in contact with the powerful ones, they can contact the person who is connected to the power. They can go with him to the powerful person and get to know him as well so next time they can go alone to the powerful person. We are contacting the powerful people alone now. If it was a collective way, if three or four people go to them, the contact increases. Anyone who wants to get in contact with the powerful man can get in touch with us. Maybe he is afraid of expressing his problems, or shy, or avoids speaking. So, this type of contact will gradually develop his confidence (Dinesh, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

The first thing to observe in Box 7 is the issue of legitimacy in a system dominated by informality. As with other settlements, whenever possible, residents would mention the fact that they held a *patta*. These documents were provided decades ago by the municipality, and nominally gave the occupants rights to occupy the land for 30 years. However, the land legally belonged to the *Nazul* Department and they had authority to sell the land to developers if they chose. In a situation reminiscent of Holston's Brazil (2008), the legal code often contradicts itself and provides sufficient leeway for ambiguity such that the interpretation of the law tends to be decided based on who has the most power. While Holston highlights that such a system creates differentiated citizenship, for my purposes it is important to understand how it creates differentiated agency. The ability of people living in informal settlements to carry on living their lives is contingent on their ability to make multiple simultaneous claims to legitimacy and legality. The *patta* provides a modicum of legality, but in the everyday realpolitik of informal settlements, the more important job is to provide a moral legitimacy that is harder to negate than the legal legitimacy. This is a clear and concrete example of the dynamics of political society where residents may simultaneously argue that their occupancy is legal, but if it's illegal it's still morally right and worthy of legal exception, and even if it's not morally right, it's necessary, and so on in a constant contestation and struggle to cling to their lives.

In a very similar way, legitimacy is claimed by situating oneself and one's community within an established hierarchy (Mines, 2014). Very early in our relationship, Keshav outlined all the important and powerful people he had close relationships with. The other SIC members added their own and put forward their claim that they could take care of whatever business they had by 'going directly' to the

concerned official. Thus, they were claiming their agency within established power structures. There is a consensus in the literature that patronage structures can constrain agency, even as they facilitate certain types of access (see, for example, my treatment in chapter 2). It is a common relational dynamic for people to be well aware of the importance of their connections and be able to list them as an act of claiming legitimacy vis-à-vis their positionality.

Finally, it should be clear from Box 7 that Keshav, like Amrit, is a ‘fixer’. In chapter 5 I discuss the role of ‘fixers’ like Amrit and Keshav in mediating relationships between people living in informal settlements and the wider society, as well as the impact that mediation has on agency. However, here it is sufficient to note that such mediation is quite a common relational dynamic. The presence of such ‘fixers’ also seems to be associated with relatively higher levels of agency (both for the ‘fixers’ themselves as part of their communities as well as the other non-‘fixer’ residents).

4.2. Patterns of relational dynamics

Across the seven vignettes in this chapter, people living in each of the seven participating settlements can be seen displaying a repertoire of behavioural dynamics consistent with political society. Seen in context, these behaviours make sense as a way of trying to maximise agency. As I highlighted in chapter 2, the political society repertoire includes such common relational dynamics as constructing a provisional identity around being a ‘slum-dweller’ which can be imbued with the values of community for the purposes of mobilising support and pressure for access to services, strategic management of political relationships including the ‘vote bank’ dynamic, and use of collective action (contentious or cooperative) to influence access or the implementation of government policy. Each of these dynamics is usually mediated by one or more entities, from local spokespersons, ‘fixers’, political patrons, or even NGO partners.

It is not my intention to explain the emergence of the political society repertoire of relational dynamics in contexts like these seven settlements. Others have sufficiently explained how these relational patterns tend to emerge from the combination of several factors, such as the way the Indian state has attempted to meet its responsibilities for service provision while being unable to guarantee equal legal citizenship to all Indians, the particular ways in which liberalisation and industrialisation have transpired in India,

along with the persistence of historical inequalities and social hierarchies. Here, I have simply documented the existence of relational patterns among the SCSVUP project participants consistent with political society. I argue that the adoption of this behavioural repertoire reflects systemic constraints on agency and perhaps represents an agency maximisation strategy given those systemic constraints. In this section, I highlight the main political society relational dynamics observed amongst the project participants. Then I consider the impact of the intervention on those dynamics and thus on agency.

4.2.1. Relational patterns before the SICs

Across the vignettes, several common factors including precarity and informality can be seen intersecting to constrain the agency of participants from the informal settlements. One of the Shanti Nagar SIC members had to drop out of the project after the fully preventable death of her husband from jaundice, even as the people of Shanti Nagar had demonstrated their awareness of health care schemes from the government that should have saved his life. The dynamics of informality and exclusion kept her family from accessing health care while gender dynamics made her reliant on her husband's livelihood for survival. These reinforcing dynamics prevented her from participating in an organizing project that might have resulted in strengthening her agency to cope better with her challenges. Other women, of course, were not able to participate because of transport – riding motorcycles or bicycles are social taboos, and in addition to the cost, there were safety concerns about taking rickshaws.

In each of the seven settlements, residents were comfortable with the idea of being a collective of 'slum-dwellers'. This was the idiom through which they were comfortable expressing their collective identities and was ultimately the axis of mobilisation for them. It was the point around which all the residents could rally to organise the SIC. For some, as in Lakshmi Nagar and Ambedkar Nagar, residents were already comfortable with and experienced with mobilising to protest or visit government officers to demand services. Devki *didi* in Shiv Nagar 1 explained in great detail how the neighbourhood colluded to maintain an ability to influence elections, while playing the political parties off each other. This demonstrated the powerful sense they had of being a coherent *mohalla*. Even in Shanti Nagar, where residents had low levels of civic agency, Smt. Chaturwedi spoke of her vision for unity in opposing eviction and the reality that anything could happen after the election.

In each of the seven settlements, residents were also illegally occupying government-owned land. To justify their occupation, residents of Shakti Nagar explained that their *parshad* had ‘sold’ off other parts of the government land to middle class families who were also illegally occupying the land, but they faced no threat of eviction. In Gandhi Nagar, the residents pointed to a hospital that was being constructed beside their settlement, also illegally, on the same Nazul land that they occupied. They questioned how it was possible to evict them from their settlement while simultaneously allowing a private hospital to be built there. In Ambedkar Nagar, residents pointed to a nearby settlement that had been cleared in order to ‘beautify’ the lake around which people had been living. The lake had been turned into a thriving business district with Raipur’s own version of ‘Marine Drive’ along which the newly wealthy would stroll to see and be seen. Meanwhile the former occupants had never received the new housing and services they had been promised as a condition for their cooperation.

In nearly every settlement, residents held some form of *patta*, a document granted by a former city administration that nominally afforded a tenuous claim to occupancy for a period of 30 years. However, it was understood that such documents would hold little legal authority and could be contravened at any time. The residents tended to frame their claims as morally justified exceptions to the letter of the law. This precarity around housing and the use of morally justified exceptions are typical of political society conditions. In the stories of these participants, one can see how the informality of land titling conspires along with things like poor services, ill health conditions, and entrenched social inequalities to trap residents of informal settlements into situations where they have few options. Whereas some people with power, wealth, or connections attain stable, though equally illegal and informal, possession of land and homes, the residents of these settlements must perpetually struggle in a fight they will eventually lose.

Protest and mobilisation are key elements of the political society repertoire, and they were visible in the vignettes across the settlements. In Box 2, the residents of Shanti Nagar were seen protesting against eviction. Keshav from Ambedkar Nagar commented about how easy it was to mobilise people to turn up to protest, but how difficult it was to get them to be part of sustained organizing action over time. Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar articulated a vision for growing the SIC organization to the point where it could mobilise masses of ‘slum-dwellers’ to put pressure on different government agencies.

‘Vote bank’ dynamics are a corollary to mobilising within the political society repertoire. ‘Vote banks’ are a form of collective action whereby residents of the informal settlement agree to vote as a bloc so that a particular candidate wins an election in exchange for preferential treatment of their bloc or community after the election. For Devki *didi* in Shiv Nagar 1, it was not just that the settlement used their votes to negotiate with the politician. They also strategically divided themselves into groups that would support all the various parties so that they could maximize the chance of being on the side of the winning politician, or the one most able to help them. They managed to play off all the parties against each other, get paid by each to do party work, and hedge against the risk and uncertainty involved in patronage politics. While this seems to have worked to some degree (community solidarity under the surface but divisions strategically projected to politicians), its complete success is belied by the way Devki described tensions between the young men and the likelihood that political divisions could result in violence if she wasn’t careful. In any case, the way Devki *didi* discussed the practice in her settlement offers a rare and exceptionally frank look at relational dynamics that typically operate beyond the view of politicians and outside observers.

The way people in Shiv Nagar 2 related to politics and political patrons is in stark contrast to Shiv Nagar 1. Shomita explained that people in Shiv Nagar 2 were ‘BJP people’ and that they had some BJP connections, but they did not get paid by or make money from their connections to the party. As Devki explained, many people in settlements are employed by parties to work on their behalf. In Shiv Nagar 1, the residents had arranged groups to work for each major party, but in Shiv Nagar 2, I did not encounter anyone employed by a party in such a way. Either they didn’t exist, or they had completely avoided us from the beginning of the SCSVUP project.

In fact, in spite of being represented by a strong *parshad*, residents of Shiv Nagar 2 seemed not to have many effective patronage relationships. After building an SIC group in the settlement, Shomita was able to use her connection to the BJP via Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar to finally get the water pipe installed that had been out of her reach for some years.

In Box 2, the residents of Shanti Nagar spoke of the realpolitik of ‘vote banks’, noting that before elections, residents of informal settlements could use their ability to act as a ‘vote bank’ to put pressure on political candidates. However, after the elections, anything could happen. If residents ‘vote banked’ for the wrong candidate, there could

be retribution from the winner. Even if their candidate won the election, they would no longer necessarily be able to use their support as leverage to make the candidate fulfil campaign promises.

Together, the vignettes from the seven participating settlements give a detailed picture of political society relational dynamics at work prior to the SCSVUP project intervention. Residents of the informal settlements faced overlapping and reinforcing constraints to their agency. Almost all social interactions were informal – from accessing services through personal relationships with officials to occupying land without recourse to legal supports. This resulted in a systemic precarity wherein people may face devastation from a number of possible directions – from loss of informal livelihood to eviction to untimely death due to lack of health care.

Life in informal settlements demands that people take collective action. Agency, for example, in the form of the ability to act as a ‘vote bank’ depends on the ability of the group to act collectively. That is why the NGO partners and I took an organizing approach that sought to build the base of relational power, so that people would be able to act collectively not just within an electoral map boundary and not just on the occasions of elections, but so that they could work in solidarity with others across distances and differences to devise new types of collective action to keep pressure on public figures in other contexts as well. The key to organizing here was to extend political society repertoires of action into new relational dynamics in new relational contexts. This would be done by intentionally building relationships (especially the SIC groups) across the participating settlements and experimenting with collective actions to figure out how to strengthen agency.

4.2.2. The impact of forming SICs on relational dynamics

This thesis is primarily about how to strengthen agency, and lessons about this are to be found in the changes to relational dynamics in response to the SCSVUP project’s intervention. Forming the SIC groups did not immediately change the calculations for the participants in all their relational dynamics. Rather, by creating new relationships and new relational conditions, the participants were able to experiment with new relational dynamics.

The SIC groups were formed on the assumption that intentionally building teams of organizers in each participating settlement who could then negotiate new dynamics and new forms of collective action would be the key to strengthening agency.

The founding assumptions and the approach to organizing practice are articulated in Box 2 and its discussion. Forming the SICs in each of the seven settlements facilitated a shift in relational dynamics, which can be seen to varying degrees across the settlements.

In Shanti Nagar, the focus of Box 2, the SIC failed to achieve a significant change to relational dynamics in the settlement. Smt. Chaturwedi from the vignette was not interested in joining the SIC, and others were kept from participation by entrenched relational constraints (Sukanya Banerjee) and difficult life circumstances (husband's death). This suggests that impact of the intervention and forming the SIC in Shanti Nagar was damped by the negative feedback loop of relational dynamics in the settlement.

Meanwhile, the residents of Gandhi Nagar were eager to form an SIC, which they managed to use to change the dynamic with the local mafia who had been harassing them and extorting money from them. Even though the members of the SIC in Gandhi Nagar had little prior experience in taking public action, they worked closely with me and PRIA to gain the capacity to survey their settlement, produce a report as documentation, and present themselves before the Commissioner to demand that they be included in RAY.

In Lakshmi Nagar, Amrit used the new SIC organization as a space to extend his existing relational dynamics as a local 'fixer' attached to the BJP. However, by connecting to other settlements through the SIC, this dynamic also spread to the other settlements. For example, Shomita from Shiv Nagar 2 had previously never been involved in public work or activism. She had been struggling to get a water supply installed in her neighbourhood for years, but without connections, she had been unsuccessful. After forming the SIC and meeting Amrit, she was able to take advantage of Amrit's connections to put enough pressure on the suppliers to get the water supply installed. This was likely mutually beneficial to both Amrit and Shomita and represents a strengthening of agency for both, through the spread of Amrit's more effective relational dynamics.

Similarly, dynamics facilitated by the SIC in Ambedkar Nagar were only a small departure from what residents there were familiar with. While there was no single representative association for the settlement prior to the SIC, groups of residents had informal meeting and discussion groups that were skilled at facilitating collective action. Multiple leaders in the neighbourhood maintained strong connections to

politicians and officials through which they could access services. Immediately after the orientation meeting introducing all the SIC members to each other, Keshav and the Ambedkar Nagar SIC began a series of all-SIC meetings in the other settlements during which they shared their organizing experiences. In this way, they began to spread their more effective relational dynamics to the other settlements through the SIC organization.

The intervention to form SICs in each settlement brought the political society relational dynamic of the residents into contact with the different approach of the NGO partners (discussed later in section 5.3.). In these new relationships, these dynamics were sometimes incompatible. For example, PRIA's approach to 'knowledge is power' did not account for the fact that the SIC members already knew about the government policies for which they qualified (the health policy mentioned in Box 2; the failure of the printed notices in Box 4).

The NGO partners and the SIC members had very different processes for monitoring and responding to power dynamics. Amrit saw his work with the SIC as an extension of his work for the BJP, and he spun it that way for his superiors. He explained that new connections made through the organizing work would provide new opportunities to carry out his duties distributing gifts from the party. Yet it was also clear that he (and the other SIC members) wanted to avoid having any political party or outside actor co-opting or crushing their organization (see box 6 and section 7.2.3.). Thus, it was always a delicate balance for the SIC members to build their power and their abilities to take effective collective action without provoking conflict or pushback from the existing power structures – especially from the powerful actors that the participants were already dependent on (see chapter 7 for further examination of collective action). This ability to remain attuned to the balance of power amongst a host of hierarchical relationships is a pattern observed across all the settlements. It is notable that this ability was conspicuously lacking in PRIA and Chetna, evidenced by the way they stumbled into a conflict with a *parshad* representing three settlements that otherwise would have participated in the SCSVUP project (see section 3.2.1.).

Forming SIC groups in the settlements revealed important information about strengthening agency. The organizing processes of forming the groups and working with them created new relationships across the settlements and between residents and the NGO partners. These new relationships allowed more effective relational dynamics to spread to some of the settlements with weaker agency. They also allowed participants

with few prior connections to access resources in new ways. The SCSVUP project created conditions for the political society relational dynamics and the relational dynamics of the NGO partners to interact with each other. The SIC groups also created the relational conditions for participants to have new experiences and learn new skills. These were significant changes to relational dynamics, and these lessons are extended and examined in greater detail in the following chapters.

4.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have drawn on evidence from my observations and interactions with the research participants to sketch out some of the key patterns of relational dynamics at work in the informal settlements. I suggest that these patterns broadly fit with the concept of political society and can be read as an attempt to maximize agency within the confines of a social system marked by inequalities. These behavioural patterns are a way to *jugaad* social relations to function more effectively, but, as has been noted elsewhere in the literature, it is unlikely that a political society repertoire will lead to radical change.

I have called attention to some common features of social reality in informal settlements – such as exclusion from the formal economy, restrictive social norms for women, poor access to services, and persistent threats to health and safety. These social features have led to a feedback loop that tends to keep people stuck in relational configurations of limited agency.

I have also identified a feedback loop process whereby residents of informal settlements are required to engage in collective action – such as ‘vote banking’, protesting, and adopting a provisional collective identity as ‘slum-dwellers’ – in order to navigate a series of brokered relationships through which they access services. The reliance on these relationships helps residents access services in the short term, but tends to lock them into a pattern of dependence which limits their ability to act in the long term.

The building of relationships between PRIA and the residents of the settlement, by way of the new SIC groups, changed this situation. It created a new relational context in which new behavioural patterns could emerge that offered greater agency for the SIC members. However, this change was not linear or straightforward. More effective relational dynamics were adopted by some members like Shomita, who began

accessing resources more effectively by going through Amrit and his connections. In other cases, SIC members built on or altered some of their existing political society tactics for the new context. For example, the SIC members from Ambedkar Nagar were used to navigating brokered relationships, as evidenced by the extensive connections they were able to name in Box 7. Once joining up with the NGO partners and the SIC members from the other settlements, they started using their connections to build up the connections and confidence of people from the other settlements who were not as experienced. This was a new relational dynamic that built on the familiar way of managing patronage relationships, but it extended it in such a way as to begin altering patronage relationships that were not desirable. In this way, it offered some participants (like the Shakti Nagar SIC) the possibility to escape the feedback loop of dependence on their unhelpful *parshad*.

Specific ways in which the new connections altered mediation processes for the participants is the focus of the next chapter. After that, I present an innovative method for seeing the new connections that were made by forming the SICs in chapter 6, and I present some of the new collective actions that were made possible through these new relationships in chapter 7.

Chapter 5 - Mediation in Raipur's informal settlements

This chapter extends the analysis of chapter 4 around the role of relational dynamics in facilitating or constraining agency for people living in informal settlements. Chapter 4 focused on the general trend in the settlements for people to adopt a political society repertoire of behaviours and how the intervention to form SICs in the participating settlements of the SCSVUP project changed those relational dynamics to contribute to strengthening agency. I suggested that mediation is an important aspect of social systems in informal settlements. Mediation impacts both relational dynamics (processes of mediating) as well as relational structures (occupying a mediating position). This chapter focuses on three main types of mediation at work in this project: the *parshad*'s role mediating between the settlement residents and the state, the local 'fixers' mediating between everyday people and power brokers, and NGO partners mediating new forms of collective action.

This chapter first explores the mediating relationships between the residents of the settlements and their respective *parshads*. After presenting evidence on the nature of *parshad* patronage relationships in each of the settlements involved in the SCSVUP project (including three settlements in a ward that were ultimately not able to participate), I propose a framework for classifying and conceptualizing *parshad* patronage relationships as displaying one of four common relational patterns. Continuing with my application of a complexity-based analysis, I argue that the four relational patterns can be considered 'attractor states' in the relational 'state space', with implications for how agency might be strengthened by shifting those relational patterns. That is, each of the four relational configurations displays a set of feedback dynamics that tend to return things to the status quo in response to change action. Identifying those dynamics may shed light on potential pathways for breaking those feedback dynamics and shifting into a new relational configuration.

Then I consider the mediating role played by local 'fixer' leaders like Amrit and Keshav. Boxes 6 and 7 in chapter 4 introduced these men and showed them as important leaders in their communities who also played important leadership roles in

the SCSVUP project. In considering how forming the SICs helped to shift relational dynamics for the participants, I noted that Amrit and Keshav's relational dynamics spread to some of the other settlements. This process receives additional attention here.

Finally, I then suggest that in creating new relationships between the participants and the NGO partners, PRIA and Chetna came to play a mediating role as well. Prior to the intervention, Amrita understood civil society actors like PRIA to be a 'bridge' between service providers and recipients capable of brokering more effective interactions. This conception evolved over the course of the project, and the mediating role PRIA, Chetna and I actually came to play looked quite different. I specifically make use of complex systems concepts to analyse the impact of the intervention on change processes and participants' agency.

5.1. The role of *parshads* as mediators

Originally, PRIA and Chetna had decided to pursue building relationships with residents of 10 different informal settlements in Raipur. Three of those settlements were located within a single ward, the **Hari Bhumi** Ward, meaning they were all represented by the same *parshad*, who happened to be a member of the Congress Party. In two of the three settlements, we had been warmly received, and there was enthusiasm for working with us to create an SIC. By the time we held a meeting in the third, the *parshad* had found out that we were having meetings in 'his slums', and he had made it clear to the residents that they must not work with us. In fact, he sent his assistants to the settlement to sow seeds of mistrust among them – namely spreading the rumour that we were trying to have them evicted.

In light of this development, Amrita phoned him directly and attempted to clear up any misunderstandings. She suggested that we meet him in his office, and we agreed to a time on a Monday evening. The following sketch illuminates the patronage dynamic.

Box 8. A dominating *parshad*

When we arrived at the office of the *parshad* for Hari Bhumi Ward, there were several people standing around inside getting forms signed and seeking assistance. The *parshad* was terse with them, signing the forms and then dispensing with them. The office was just a desk with an old dusty desktop computer with a fading monitor, two



sofas and a dingy green carpet. The front was a glass wall with peeling silver tint, which gave the office the feel of an auto repair shop. Men who might have been operatives or thugs milled around in front of the building chewing *paan*.

We introduced ourselves and began explaining the innocuous nature of the work we wanted to do and how it might benefit him. He responded by saying that he was responsible for organizing the ‘slum-dwellers’, that he would give them all the knowledge they needed about schemes. He also said that the slum-dwellers were greedy and that they were only interested in working with our project because we were offering them things. Then he said that we were frightening the residents. Someone came in carrying a photocopy of a notice we had put up in the settlement previously advertising that a meeting would be held. He said that because of this, the residents thought that we were coming to evict them, and two of them had died of a heart attack. For this he claimed that he had filed a police report against Nidhi. He conspicuously pulled out a Samsung Galaxy phone worth about \$1000 to show us some pictures of his own meeting in the settlement.

It wasn’t clear if there had been any adverse reaction from people in the settlement, but that claim, as well as his claim that he had filed an FIR, were clearly bluster and theatre. In any case, Nidhi’s husband had his own strong connections to the police and politicians, so if push came to shove, we had our own connections to defend ourselves with. In our meeting, he also hinted that he would use violence against us if we didn’t heed his warning.

Kali Nagar was the settlement where the problems had occurred. After the *parshad* came and disparaged the prospect of forming an SIC group, Chetna field staff were harassed and chased from the area when they attempted to visit. In a reflection conversation with me, Amrita said that we should have gone to all the *parshads* before we began with community meetings, or at least made sure that they wouldn’t cause problems for us. She said:

Mistakes, mistakes, mistakes, we won’t build strong rapport with the slum dwellers because of our mistakes. We just visited 2 or three times. How can we develop trust with them? In order to work in the slums, you have to build the relationship with them over a long time. If we wanted, we could keep working in Kali Nagar, but it would take all our time and efforts, and we couldn’t do anything else. Actually, it takes a long time, and you have to build the relationships first. So now, because of our mistakes, we may not be able to work in that slum. But if we give it up, we’re giving the wrong message to all the others that we can be easily intimidated, and we are just working as a formality. We have to work as an activist (Amrita, 5 December 2012, reflection discussion).

The *parshad* of this ward not only attempted to intimidate us – through threats of violence and harassment – he actively monitored the activities of the residents of the informal settlements in his ward and intimidated them. Even as we explained that we would help the residents of his ward gain access to housing rights through the RAY policy, he spread rumours among his constituents that we were trying to have them evicted. He was seemingly unconcerned about the actual welfare of his constituents. He occupied a position of power and authority, and he showed a willingness to use many different means – including violence – to hold on to his position. This kind of relationship was one of domination.

In this case, the residents of the settlements may have supported their *parshad* – perhaps in exchange for his ‘protection’ – or they may have preferred a different *parshad*. Either way, they were powerless to oppose him. Thus, their agency was constrained by this patronage relationship. Further, because of this intense domination, attempting to build relationships towards ‘empowerment’ of the residents of the settlements would have put them at risk as much as it would have put us at risk. Because communication had been cut off, there was no way to assess the risks of proceeding and make a decision with the residents of those three settlements. After much discussion, PRIA leadership decided to abandon efforts to organize SIC groups in the three settlements of Hari Bhumi Ward.



Shakti Nagar was located in a ward represented by a *parshad* from the Congress Party. The residents of this settlement had a long-standing conflict with him about the uncertainty of their housing tenure, their access to services, and the fact that their homes flooded often because of poor drainage. According to Janisha, the most active and outspoken SIC member from this settlement (mentioned in chapter 4, box 1 along with her husband, Motilal), the *parshad* had illegally purchased the previously public land and had then sold it off in pieces to developers to turn the area into a bustling middle class neighbourhood. In fact, nice middle-class homes had been built just on the other side of the street from this ‘slum’, and as they had been built, the drainage problem had been exacerbated – essentially turning the informal settlement into a marsh trapped between the railway tracks on one side and the new impermeable cement and asphalt constructions on the other.

The *parshad* made no secret of the fact that he would rather the settlement be gone. When we went with the SIC members to his office to ask his support for

implementing the RAY policy in the settlement, he shot back ‘Why are you coming to me? You have your own organization now, so take care of your own problems!’

(*Parshad* of Shakti Nagar, 4 December 2012, facilitated dialogue).

Still, over the years-long conflict, he had not managed to dominate the residents. They persisted in their occupation of the land, obtaining assurances from the Railway (the legal owners of the settlement land) that they would only be evicted when, eventually, the tracks would be expanded to accommodate greater rail traffic. The residents of the settlement cultivated relationships with members of the BJP party, and this gave them just enough leverage to carry on with their lives without support from their *parshad*, who nonetheless remained the primary patronage relationship for the settlement, broken down and ineffective as it was for both sides. Janisha’s husband, Motilal, explained the situation with the *parshad*:

The main reason why the *parshad* doesn’t support us is because he knows the people of this *basti* don’t vote for him. As people listened to him previously, and acted as he told them to, but today the scenario is different. Today people see whether what he is doing is for their benefit or not. They came to know that the things the *parshad* has done will create problems, so they protest. He is annoyed because people do not come and beg to solve their problems nowadays. He also thinks that we people are living on Railway land. He can tell the Railway to demolish this slum. This is his thinking (Motilal, 20 April 2013, facilitated reflection discussion).

In spite of the fact that the settlement residents were in conflict with their *parshad*, the relationship can be characterised as one of neglect. The *parshad* did not have enough power to dominate the residents, nor did they have enough power to force him to provide better services. Because of the *parshad*’s formal role as elected representative, they were stuck with each other, but the residents made use of alternative relationships to get by.

In contrast to Shakti Nagar, **Shanti Nagar** maintained a relationship of neglect with their *parshad* without open conflict. With Amrita and Nidhi, I went to visit the *parshad* in his office. He was, in fact, not the *parshad* at all, but the former *parshad*. After his tenure in office, his mother was elected to the position, but he continued to sit in the office and handle the official business. After explaining our plan to work with people living in the settlement to get information and to prepare for participation in the RAY scheme, he offered his tacit support. While he wasn’t concerned that ‘empowerment’ of his ‘vote bank’ would put his position at risk, he simply was not enthusiastic about tinkering with any of the existing arrangements. He understood that a



participatory policy like RAY would not be likely to succeed – that it might lead to uncertain outcomes like a ‘temporary’ relocation of the settlement that became permanent. Further, any policy would become politicized, and he did not want to be forced to pick sides in a policy debate that could risk alienating any of his constituents. In short, while he was not interested in dominating his constituents, he simply could not be bothered to take any risks (especially that he would lose his ‘vote bank’ through relocation) in pursuit of their advancement.



The settlements of Lakshmi Nagar and **Gandhi Nagar** were both located in a single ward and thus shared a *parshad*, Mr Singh, though they maintained very different types of patronage relationships with him. Gandhi Nagar’s was one of dependency. The following is an account of the visit I made to him with Amrita and Nidhi.

Box 9. A dependency relationship with a *parshad*

The office was in a one-room concrete building with barred doors for locking up at night. The main room was painted blue, and it was full of supplicants with forms and issues for the councillor when we arrived, but they were being attended to by an assistant. We asked where the *parshad* was, but they told us he was out. Amrita spoke to him on the phone, and we were instructed to meet him at a certain restaurant in the more commercial area of the ward. Mr Singh was in his jeep talking to people. We had to wait. His assistant greeted us curtly and then was silent. After a few minutes, we went in with the assistant and sat at a table. Tea was ordered, and only then Mr Singh came to join us. He was a solid-looking Sikh man with small hands; a little short, but stout. Black beard combed into neat waves. Tightly wound, slightly faded pink turban.

He was sceptical of our work in the settlements of his ward. He thought that if the settlement residents formed a committee, they would turn against him. He seemed actually to be quite popular with his constituents, even if he gave the impression of a mobster. We tried to make the meetings and the organizing effort seem apolitical, but then his assistant interjected that after the meeting in which the residents had formed their SIC, some of them told him ‘We don’t need you anymore.’

Ultimately, Mr Singh said he would support us working with people in the ward to organize SICs, but he wanted control over the membership. He wanted to select an additional 3 or 4 people who were loyal to him. We didn’t oppose him at the time, but later there was much discussion about how to handle this. Amrita and I agreed that to let

him control the makeup of the committee would undermine the community's authority and politicize everything they did going forward. But we also had to be careful not to oppose the *parshad* directly so he wouldn't make life miserable for the participants and us.

We decided to invite Mr Singh to the next meeting to come and see for himself what the SICs were doing. Given his busy schedule, we knew he would be unlikely to make the time to attend. In this way, we would look good for being open and transparent, and if he did come to the meeting, he would only be able to get his people added to the SIC by hijacking the proceedings and openly coercing them. Given how perceptive he was to the power dynamics, I calculated that he would not risk upsetting his constituents by so obviously trying to dominate them in public.

In Gandhi Nagar, the residents had maintained a reasonably positive relationship with Mr Singh for years. He had helped them improve their access to services to the point where every house had an electricity connection, most of those had an individual meter, there were several manual water pumps throughout the settlement, and there was an *anganwaadi* just across the street from the settlement. They routinely went to visit him about their concerns, and throughout the project, I witnessed the SIC members making multiple visits attempting to get support for the installation of a public light. The fact that they had been meeting him about this light for almost a year without success was evidence that they had few other options. The formation of the SIC did result in a shift in their *parshad* relational dynamics – namely that by the end of the project, they had begun meeting with Mr Singh as a united, representative association instead of as a group of individual constituents. Further, as described in box 3 of chapter 4, the residents of Gandhi Nagar had been dealing with a small-time mafia that was trying to extort money from them. It seemed that one of the main reasons the mafia was not able to harm them was because of their relationship with Mr Singh.



Shiv Nagar 1 and 2 both maintained relationships of dependency with their respective *parshads*, though with an interesting element of interrelation. These two settlements were separated only by a ward boundary. Thus, even as they were only one settlement, they had different patronage dynamics. Further, as I described in chapter 4, Shiv Nagar 1 was a place of cutthroat political struggle, where the residents worked to keep the peace between factions while also colluding to play the parties off each other.

The land that this settlement occupied was owned publically, and over the years, the value had risen as the city expanded such that what had once been on the periphery was now in the central heart of the city's residential district. Residents near the *nala* flowing through the settlement were continually getting eviction notices, and in spite of being in possession of a *patta* nominally ensuring their right to lease the land, there was a palpable sense that the entire settlement could be cleared and redeveloped at any time. Thus, whoever was elected *parshad* would hold tremendous power over the residents of the settlements. Thus, their ability to act collectively to negotiate with different candidates meant that whoever was elected also needed their support.

In fact, the *parshad* from Shiv Nagar 2, The Councillor (as I refer to him throughout this thesis), was trying to encroach on Shiv Nagar 1 even as he needed not pay much attention to his own constituents in Shiv Nagar 2. This Councillor had aspirations of running for state-wide office, and as I described in Chapter 4, he seemed to be urging residents of Shiv Nagar 1 not to participate in their SIC, even as he supported the SIC in his own Shiv Nagar 2 constituency.

The end result for Shiv Nagar 1 was that they were locked into a relationship of dependency with their *parshad*, which manifested itself as a strong 'vote bank' dynamic. They were strongly dependent on their *parshad* for their ability to continue occupying their settlement, but he was in turn strongly dependent on them to hold on to his office in the face of stiff political competition.

Meanwhile, **Shiv Nagar 2** was in a quiet political state – its BJP *parshad*, The Councillor, faced little real competition. Thus the residents of Shiv Nagar 2 were dependent on the support of their *parshad*, but they were unable to work the 'vote bank' dynamic in their favour. He supported the Shiv Nagar 2 SIC enough to attend the City Consultation co-hosted by the SICs, PRIA, and Chetna, though he behaved crassly and patronizingly. Further, the SIC members in Shiv Nagar 2 had nothing but praise for their *parshad*.

Lakshmi Nagar was located within the same ward as Gandhi Nagar, and thus shared Mr Singh as *parshad*. However, Mr Singh never came up in discussions with SIC members in Lakshmi Nagar. Rather than being dependent on Mr Singh for access to resources, Amrit and the other residents of Lakshmi Nagar maintained a patronage relationship with a range of other BJP politicians and party operatives, especially Jitesh *bhai* – the *Mandal Adhyaksh* (Board Chairman) of the Shram Kalyan Mandal (Labour Welfare Board) – an organization that worked as an extension of the state level BJP, as I



described in Chapter 4. Thus, Amrit acted as a ‘fixer’ for his own settlement by connecting other residents to helpful opportunities and resources, and he was able to extend his ‘fixer’ role to other settlements through the SIC organization. It was precisely this connection to an alternative set of patrons that allowed Lakshmi Nagar residents to supplement or in some cases replace patronage from their *parshad*. Both of these patrons belonged to the BJP, so they were not in direct competition with each other. Still, the existence of two separate powerful connections allowed the residents of Lakshmi Nagar to move beyond the dependency dynamic that Gandhi Nagar had with Mr Singh.



Ambedkar Nagar also managed to maintain alternative patronage relationships, which allowed them to avoid dependence on their *parshad*. During the first year of the SCSVUP project, before PRIA had developed the idea of working directly with people living in the informal settlements to build committees, they had carried out a counting exercise – visiting and counting all the informal settlements in the city and comparing their findings to the official list held by the *nagar nigam* (municipality) (PRIA, 2013). This was how Amrita met Keshav from Ambedkar Nagar. The *parshad* for this area warned her that people in Ambedkar Nagar were ‘outside of his control’. He commented that he had no influence over them, and they had no respect for him. They were always mobilising for something or other and handling their own affairs with various officials. For Keshav, this was a matter of pride and also a pragmatic strategy.

Dinesh, another SIC member from Ambedkar Nagar, who would come to play a big leadership role, explained that while he maintained strong working relationships with many politicians and officials, he did not want to rely too much on the *parshad*. The SIC members felt the *parshad* was not helpful enough to warrant their deference, and further, involving him in the work of the SIC would risk making the SIC seem political. Keshav explained:

Before the *parshad* even gives us any information, we’ve already completed the work. The *parshad* didn’t know about the four corner walls of the school and the opening of *anganwaadi* in the slum (Keshav, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

Dinesh added:

That is why we have kept the *parshad* side-lined. We have done that to all the *parshads*. He may be of Congress or any party (Dinesh, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

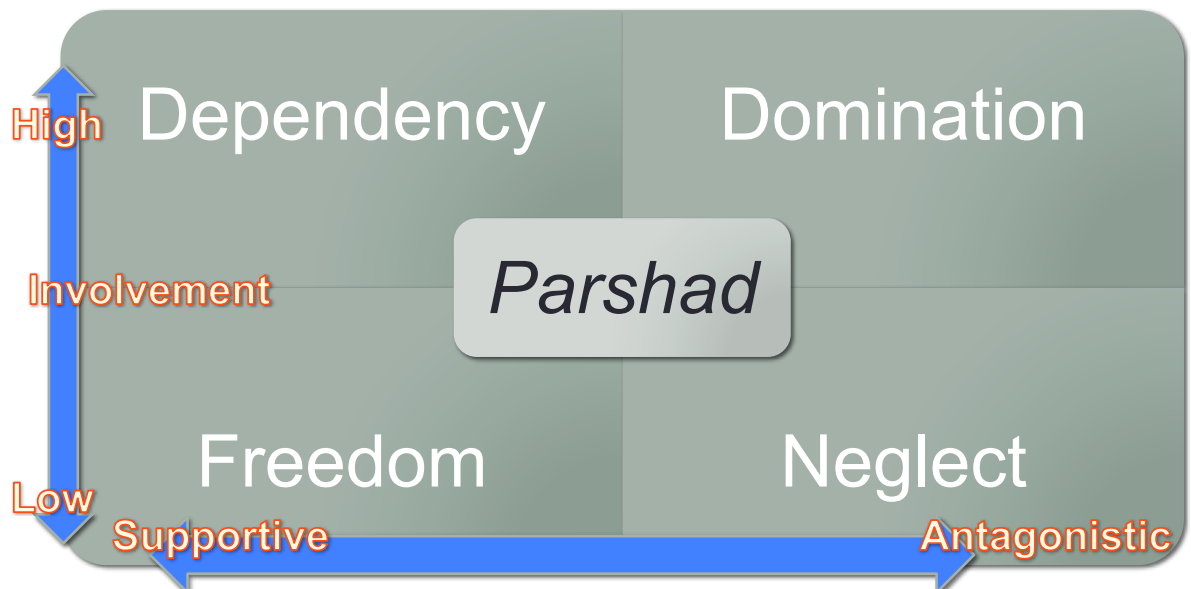
Keshav then concluded:

If we involve the *parshad* with the basti vikas samiti (SIC), it will become a more political affair. Already people of the SIC are connected to different parties. If we include the *parshad*, the non-political image of the SIC will be ruined. We can cooperate with him, but we cannot take him into our activities (Keshav, 18 March 2013, facilitated group discussion and network analysis).

Instead of dependence on the *parshad*, Keshav and the residents of Ambedkar Nagar maintained working relationships with a number of other powerful figures, including the Collector and the Commissioner, often accompanying other residents on visits to their offices to assist with some matter of patronage. While the main alternative patron was clear in the case of Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar, Keshav's alternative patron(s) were less obvious. It was clear that he was connected to the BJP, and the SIC members often brought up the fact that he had been a field organizer for the BJP some years prior. He had no obvious day job, and it was socially impossible to probe into his livelihood, but it seemed clear that he was still earning from his connections to one or more patrons within the BJP. Like Amrit, he managed to attain prestige and power through his role as 'fixer' for his settlement.

5.1.1. The four types of *parshad* patronage relationship

Figure 7. The four main *parshad* patronage relationship configurations



Based on the descriptions above, patterns can be observed in how residents of the various settlements related to their *parshads*. It is important to say up front that

regardless of the dynamics, the relationship with the *parshad* was important for each settlement. Beyond that, there were differences based on two main aspects of the *parshad* relationship. The first was how involved the *parshad* was in the daily lives of the residents – ranging from low levels of involvement to high involvement. The second was whether the substance of that involvement was more antagonistic or supportive. These dimensions form the axes of figure 7, the four quadrants of which represent the four relational configurations between *parshad* and constituents observed across the settlements during the SCSVUP project. The following are descriptions of the four configurations, though both dimensions were continua rather than binaries. In each configuration, feedback loop dynamics can be seen that tend to keep the system within that particular dynamic configuration. Each of the settlements examined above are then plotted on these axes in figure 8.

Domination (high involvement, antagonistic): The *Parshad* was strong and able to prevent other unwanted actors from encroaching on ‘his’ territory. The settlements of **Hari Bhumi Ward** were dominated by their *parshad*. This was clear from the heavy-handed ways he intervened to turn the residents against PRIA and Chetna, as well as how he threatened us not to continue building relationships with people in ‘his’ ward. While this raises many questions about how exactly residents in these settlements experienced and negotiated their agency, unfortunately the risks of working in these areas prevented me from collecting any further data. It is unfortunate that three settlements in which residents were enthusiastic about participating in a potentially empowering project had to be abandoned. Based on the evidence available, it is clear that the *parshad*’s proactive efforts to isolate and dominate his constituents prevented us from working to change the dynamic. Thus a dominance dynamic configuration is likely to perpetuate itself by actively preventing challenges to the domination.

Neglect (low involvement, antagonistic): The *Parshad* was not very involved and did not display concern about providing services to residents of the settlements. **Shanti Nagar** and **Shakti Nagar** displayed the neglect relational configuration with their respective *parshads*. Residents of these settlements had few additional relationships through which they might access resources, but neither could they effectively negotiate with their *parshad* to access resources through that connection. In Shakti Nagar, the *parshad* was actively hostile while in Shanti Nagar, the *parshad* simply found no

compelling motivation to do much on behalf of the settlement residents. Of all the configurations, neglect appears to be the least ‘stable’. Neglect appears to emerge in the absence of a strong overlapping set of self-interests or incentives between *parshad* and constituents. In the case of Shakti Nagar, the *parshad* would likely have dominated them if he had the power, while the residents would have forced him to provide resources if they had the power. Instead, an enduring stalemate became the configuration. However, if something happened to tip the balance of power, this configuration seems ripe for transitioning to either domination (if the *parshad* gained power) or independence (if the constituents gained power).

Dependency (high involvement, supportive): The *Parshad* was strong and able to provide access to resources for residents. **Gandhi Nagar** as well as **Shiv Nagars 1 and 2** displayed the dependency dynamic configuration. This was generally accompanied by the ‘vote bank’ dynamic where the *parshad* needed the votes of the residents in order to get elected and so had an incentive to provide access to resources. At the same time, this usually meant residents were expected to depend on their *parshad* and express loyalty in exchange for those resources. This is perhaps the prototypical patronage relationship type. When dependence is actually mutual dependence involving reciprocity, this kind of relationship can be perceived as favourable and legitimate by residents of informal settlements, even if inherent inequalities are left unproblematized. Dependency appears to be a rather stable dynamical state. Even if either party finds the relationship to be less than ideal, each profits from the continuation of the give-and-take relationship. Thus they have reinforcing incentives to keep the existing relational configuration going. If the *parshad* stopped responding to constituents’ pressures to provide resources, they maintained a credible threat to vote him out of office (having the required agency to take such effective collective action). At the same time, if the constituents began accessing resources through other channels, or if their support began to wane, the *parshad* would have incentives to either destroy those alternative channels or somehow regain the constituents’ support. Further, because the existence of this configuration is predicated on mutual dependence and long-term interactions, both sides are in regular contact and primed to be attuned to any changes in the relational dynamic. This makes intervention in cases of dependency more likely to provoke a backlash than the other configurations.

Freedom/Independence (low involvement, supportive): The *Parshad* was either not strong or not able to manage the reciprocal vote bank/loyalty dynamic with the residents such that they found other, stronger, patrons with which to ally themselves. Both **Lakshmi Nagar** and **Ambedkar Nagar** displayed this relational dynamic configuration. This patronage relationship type implies that the power balance has shifted such that residents have more agency regarding the content of their relationships than under dependence. However, this does not imply that the residents no longer need or make use of patronage relationships. In this project, the ability to avoid dependence on the *parshad* was derived from the existence of multiple other patronage relationships. Because of the *parshad*'s unique position, the *parshad* patronage relationship retains its central importance even if the bulk of patronage-based resources come from a different source. Thus, both the *parshad* and the constituents have incentives to remain on good terms and to maintain mutually beneficial incentive structures. Further, the relational dynamics between the residents of informal settlements and these non-*parshad* patrons were quite different from those with the *parshad*, as I explain below.

Figure 8. Locations of settlements in the *parshad* patronage relationship space

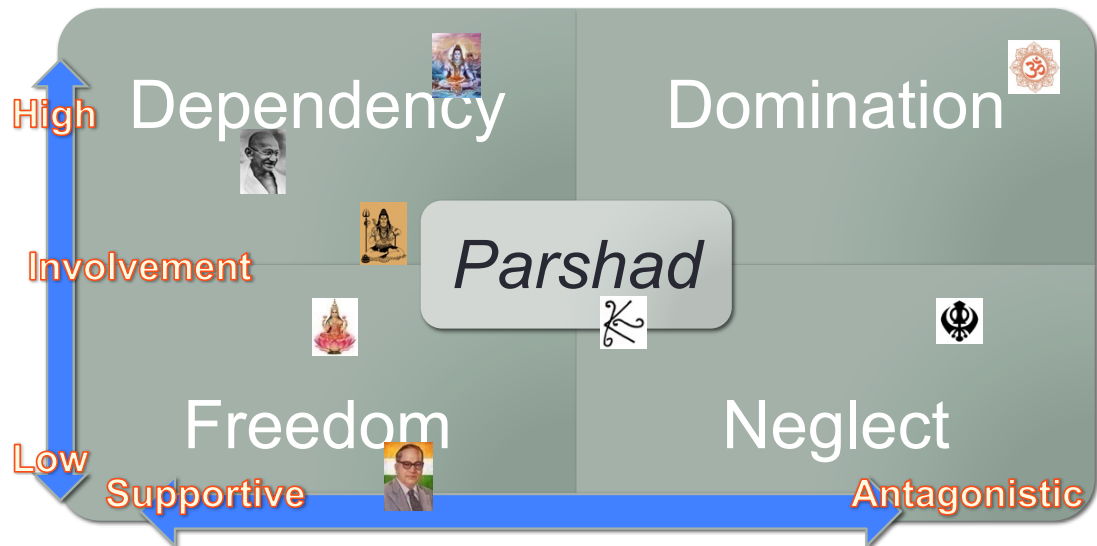


Figure 8 shows each of the seven settlements plus the Hari Bhumi Ward plotted in the relational state space. Hari Bhumi is located at the extremes of both high involvement and highly antagonistic. Shakti Nagar and Shanti Nagar are both located in

the Neglect space, with both of their *parshads* being weakly involved. The *parshad* of Shakti Nagar, though, was actively antagonistic to the residents (without the power to dominate them), while that of Shanti Nagar was merely ambivalent about their outcomes. Shiv Nagar 1 showed high involvement with mild support in their very strong ‘vote bank’ dynamic with their *parshad*. Shiv Nagar 2 lacked the strong ‘vote bank’ dynamic, and thus their *parshad*, while supportive, was not as actively involved. Mr Singh was somewhat involved and somewhat supportive for Gandhi Nagar, thus they are placed in the centre of the Dependency state. Finally, Lakshmi Nagar and Ambedkar Nagar are placed in the Freedom state, with Ambedkar Nagar interacting very infrequently with their *parshad* while Mr Singh was more active in Lakshmi Nagar – being part of the same BJP circles as Jitesh *bhai*.

5.1.2. The impact of the *parshad* patronage relationship on agency

Domination:

The domination configuration presents the most risks, both for participants as well as researchers and intervening organizations. In the case of Hari Bhumi Ward, the *parshad* threatened violence if we continued our efforts to connect with residents in ‘his’ settlements. It seems likely that such a person would also threaten constituents who challenged him or refused to fall in line. Because of the great risks inherent in taking any actions toward reconfiguring power relations in these circumstances, great care must be taken to discern and navigate those risks when considering and potentially taking action. It is not clear how to go about reconfiguring power relations in these circumstances, but what does seem clear is that any action in this direction will likely result in intense retaliation and pushback to stop the effort before it has a chance to have any impact. This would need to be anticipated and planned for. Unfortunately, due to the challenges of working with the *parshad* of Hari Bhumi Ward, I was unable to collect any further data about the agency of people living in those settlements.

Neglect:

In the configuration of neglect, constituents appear to have quite limited agency. Agency for people living in Shakti Nagar was limited because they got very few resources from their *parshad*, and this was also a result of not having enough agency to pressure him more effectively or build alternative connections. Agency for people in

Shanti Nagar was also limited in a similar way, even though their *parshad* had no malicious intent. They simply did not have the ability to put effective pressure on him, nor had they built alternative relationships for access to resources. Compared to the other configurations, the neglect configuration seems to offer the most straightforward pathway to increasing agency: create alternative pathways to resources by forming new relationships and strengthen the capacities for collective action. However, this configuration also seems to be correlated with such low initial levels of civic agency that following such a pathway is extremely challenging. The residents of Shanti Nagar, for example, had such limited abilities to take action that they were unable to take much advantage of the SCSVUP project even without resistance from their *parshad*. I argue elsewhere that new relationships formed through the SCSVUP project in these settlements did strengthen their agency, though by the end of the SCSVUP project, it was unclear exactly how much it had shifted their relational dynamic with their *parshad*.

Dependency:

The relational configuration of dependency impacts agency by tying it into forms of patronage. Constituents gain a measure of access to resources and power by remaining in a subservient position toward the more powerful *parshad*. Thus a ‘good’ *parshad* patron might be a relatively desirable outcome for people living in informal settlements. The patronage form offers an idiom for placing generally accepted obligations on the *parshad* to care for his constituents, though it requires the constituents to perform the role of helpless and dependent ‘poor’. It is an interesting paradox that, in the relational state space available to people living in slums, perhaps their position of maximum agency is to perform a role suggesting they are powerless.

Additionally, whereas residents in situations of neglect have little to lose, those in situations of dependency must be careful not to upset existing channels of patronage or power dynamics. If patrons feel threatened, relational dynamics could shift from mutually beneficial patronage to domination. In situations of Dependency, the recommendation is to build alternative pathways to patronage very carefully, paying close attention to existing patronage relationships and attempting to manage the transition without appearing threatening – at least not until the alternative patronage relationships are strong enough to risk a confrontation.

Freedom/Independence:

For people in a relational configuration of freedom, agency is much less constrained by the need to access resources through the *parshad* relationship. However, this does not imply that all residents of the settlement have equal agency or that the settlement residents have sufficient agency to completely live the lives they would prefer. Freedom from dependence on the *parshad* comes at the cost of dependence (at least of certain ‘fixer’ brokers) on a range of other patrons. Having multiple options for accessing resources gives people a measure of additional power, but this configuration also highlights the limits of a power that is always mediated by a form of patronage. The previous chapter demonstrated how forming SICs strengthened agency even for participants from Lakshmi Nagar and Ambedkar Nagar, but examination of collective action taken by these SIC groups (in chapter 7) shows their connections to alternative patrons still restricted the kinds of public action they were able to take. Ultimately, a patronage form of mediation seems to be a requirement for people living in informal settlements. Independence seems to be achieved by merely diversifying the channels and forms of patronage, with subsequent trade-offs for individual and collective agency, rather than escaping patronage altogether.

5.1.3. The complexity of *parshad* patronage relationships

Subhash and I reflected on our experiences working with the SIC members from the 7 participating settlements to try to understand the dynamics around patronage and mediation. Subhash concluded with the following:

Keshav, any *parshad* does not touch him, because he has got more, more connections. So he is afraid, ‘If I touch Keshav, the entire slum will die, then whatever vote I will have, I won’t get.’ So he’s not touching him. But for the place like, you know, Gandhi Nagar or Shakti Nagar, they are not that strong.... See, further, we have to be more careful about moving in those slums. Because the moment the information of establishing the core group [the Janjagran Samiti] and their movement starts, at that moment they will see. The political people, they’re keeping a close watch, always a close watch. Somebody is there to inform them (Subhash, 11 April 2013, reflection discussion).

Firstly, Subhash called attention to the unique relational dynamics at work in Lakshmi Nagar and Ambedkar Nagar. In those two settlements, the *parshad* ‘cannot touch’ the active residents. A relationship exists between *parshad* and constituents, but it is more balanced than a typical patron-client relationship. This is because of the close patronage relationships certain ‘fixers’ had with BJP leaders. In Lakshmi Nagar, it was

because Amrit worked closely with Jitesh *bhai* and the Shram Kalyan Mandal. In the case of Ambedkar Nagar, it was because Keshav (and some other active residents) maintained ‘more, more connections’ with other powerful political actors including the Collector and the Commissioner. In these two settlements, the additional patronage relationships, providing additional access and pathways to resources, shifted the balance of power in the collective relationship with the *parshad*, giving the residents a better bargaining position and thus greater agency in how they engaged in the everyday process of negotiating survival.

Secondly, Subhash pointed out that the SIC members from the other participating settlements did not have such diversified patronage relationships, and therefore had less agency in negotiating the pursuit of their interests. Further, this lack of independence created greater vulnerability for them, as well as greater risks when taking collective action.

It should be expected that politicians whose power depends on their occupying a very precise place in the system of relationships would be finely attuned changes in the power landscape. That is, mechanisms already exist for them to be able to monitor the activities of people living in the settlements and to perceive whether or not those activities constitute a threat to the status quo. Subhash suggests that while *parshads* in Lakshmi Nagar and Ambedkar Nagar could monitor and perceive the threat posed by the organized SICs, they were not in a position to stop it. However, in the other settlements where residents were not independent, it should be expected that if or when the SIC groups had organized sufficiently to be able to have an impact – i.e. the point where ‘empowerment’ had been achieved or where the SIC organization was capable of taking action that could change the system – the *parshads* would respond to defend their position and crush any threat to the status quo. In the settlements of Hari Bhumi Ward, this is exactly what happened. However, Subhash suggested that if we were careful to manage the shifting of the power landscape, the risk of provoking harmful reactions could be navigated.

In keeping with a complexity-informed generative approach to analysis, I have proposed a framework that correlates relational outcomes to specific kinds of relational dynamics. Patronage has long been understood to ‘lubricate’ social and political processes in India, but this framework offers a way to explore pathways for change. Patronage relationships between residents of informal settlements and their elected representatives are of central importance to their agency, but they are not the only forms

of patronage or mediation. The above analysis focuses on the feedback loop dynamics that keep relationships stuck in a particular state. This phenomenon is referred to as an ‘attractor state’ by complex systems thinkers: properties of a system interact to keep dynamics within a particular state by damping the effects of perturbations. What appears to be an ‘equilibrium’ is actually a provisionally stable dynamic state that relies on systemic mechanisms to continually undermine changes. When attempting to strengthen agency by shifting relational dynamics, it is important to understand how the system is likely to respond to undo the impact of change action.

Others have proposed that ‘networking’, or creating new relationships, is the key to empowerment, but this must be understood in its complex systems context. New relationships are likely to have different effects depending on the prior relational state. For people in a state of neglect, new relationships might straightforwardly lead to greater access and stronger agency. However, for people in a state of dependency, new relationships might quickly lead to retaliation and disruption of access with a result that agency could be weakened. The patronage dynamics of participants in the freedom/independence state suggest that greater agency can be achieved by finding a pathway to diversifying patronage relationships, but this must be navigated and negotiated on a case-by-case basis given the initial conditions for each group of participants. Ultimately, we should not expect strengthened agency for people living in informal settlements to be associated with escaping patronage relationships altogether, but by gradually shifting relational dynamics in their favour over time through new and more beneficially mediated relationships.

5.2. The role of ‘fixers’ as mediators

The independence relational configuration is correlated with the presence of local ‘fixers’. Rather than the mutual dependence that is a key feature of the ‘vote bank’ dynamic, the additional patronage relationships that allow settlements to be independent of their *parshad* seem to bring certain individuals within the settlement to prominent positions with a measure of power in exchange for being agents of these alternative patrons. That is, rather than collectively bargaining with a single major patron, local ‘fixers’ exchange allegiance to a patron for a measure of individual power by distributing patronage on his behalf. It may be that competition among potential patrons leads to the emergence of ‘fixers’, which can help their communities diversify

patronage connections. Alternatively, it may be that local leaders pro-actively seek out alternative patrons to avoid dependence on a single one. Regardless of how such arrangements typically develop, we may reasonably assume that working toward a situation of diversified patronage may result in the presence of ‘fixers’ and potentially strengthened agency. This suggests that the role of ‘fixers’ as mediators is extremely important for efforts to strengthen agency by intervening in patronage relationships.

‘Fixers’ such as Amrit and Keshav are also associated with better outcomes for the residents of their settlements. By examining them and their approaches to their leadership roles in detail, I will provide a more detailed picture of how ‘fixers’ work as mediators and their importance in strengthening agency for other people living in informal settlements. From their descriptions in chapter 4 (especially boxes 6 and 7), it is clear that they differ in their conceptions of themselves as ‘fixers’.

Amrit felt that grassroots organizing should imitate the organizational structure of political parties, with a clear chain of command and leadership positions occupied by people with demonstrated leadership capacities. Everyday people in the settlements would benefit from the connections and power of the local organization, but they would not be expected to become leaders. Amrit explained that even the other members of the Lakshmi Nagar SIC preferred to ‘sleep’ rather than proactively attend meetings or take action. Yet, even as he was deliberate about making his SIC work compatible with his ‘fixer’ work, he also planned for the SIC organization to grow and attain sufficient power to be able to work for the interests of the settlements even if it went against the interests of the party. This power would be developed by building SICs in as many settlements as possible and staffing them with proven leaders so that a large group of people could be relied upon to act in solidarity. For Amrit, this would require party-like discipline and chain of command.

In contrast, Keshav felt that grassroots organizing should strengthen the leadership capacities of everyday people by connecting them directly to patrons or powerful actors with resources. He even intentionally missed one of the SIC meetings in an attempt to get the other SIC members to take responsibilities for facilitation. Keshav understood that being a well-connected ‘fixer’ brought individual power, but he insisted that that power be distributed and used for the empowerment of others rather than for personal gain. He and the other SIC members criticized Amrit for failing to bring the other SIC members to meetings, and they even accused him of skimming money from his work making ID cards for people living in his settlement. Keshav also planned to

build the power of the SIC organization by expanding into new settlements. However, for Keshav, the key to building organizational power was to strengthen the agency, leadership capacities, and connections of the SIC members in each settlement – members that would mostly be everyday people rather than experienced party operatives.

In chapter 2, I argued that ‘fixers’ have not been studied sufficiently. Some authors (namely de Wit and Berner (2009)) point out the systematic incentives that ‘fixers’ face to perpetuate scarcity and inequality in order to maintain their relative advantage. It would be naïve to assume that local leaders are completely altruistic, and empowerment projects that do so will likely fail. However, the examples from the SCSVUP project suggest that, as individuals, ‘fixers’ display a mix of altruism and selfishness that varies from person to person. Importantly, ‘fixers’ like Amrit and Keshav live in their settlements. This seems to demand a genuine concern for the collective wellbeing of the settlement and check selfish impulses. In spite of their relative advantage, life in the settlement still requires relationships (with some degree of mutual dependence) with their neighbours.

In the SCSVUP project, Amrit and Keshav were able to make unique contributions based on their positions as ‘fixers’. At the same time, the differences in their approaches to the work meant it was crucial to engage them differently and judiciously in different contexts. For example, Amrit was able to help members of the other SICs access services through his own party connections. Keshav, on the other hand, was able to inspire and prepare the other SIC members to tell their story to the media.

It was only by taking action together and having regular reflection conversations that I was able to get a sense of their values and motivations. This might easily have been missed by academic researchers, NGO workers, or policy-implementing bureaucrats without the long-term, personal relationships I was able to build with each of them over time. Individual ‘fixers’ face a different set of incentives from the general ones outlined in the literature. Assumptions cannot be made about how individual ‘fixers’ will behave in a project like the SCSVUP project. Any particular individual ‘fixer’ is likely to have a unique mix of selfish and altruistic motivations. Moral assessments they make about their actions and assessments made by other project participants will always be contested and context specific. Without genuine relationships built and maintained over time, it is highly unlikely that outside actors

would be able to predict how an individual ‘fixer’ would behave or how the other participants would assess whether those actions were right or wrong.

People generally subscribe to a somewhat flexible set of norms and ethical values about what is acceptable and desirable behaviour for patronage relationships – including both ‘fixers’ and higher-order patrons (see also (Piliavsky, 2014b)). For emphasis, Dinesh and Keshav told a story about the worst kind of ‘fixer’: someone who uses the trust people place in mediators to exploit vulnerable people. They also used the opportunity to critique Amrit’s leadership style. Dinesh explained:

Amrit, on behalf of Jitesh bhai, is mainly responsible for distributing sewing machines, cycles, and other things; the 13 schemes operated under the CM [Chief Minister]. And he has been given power to arrange making various cards like Shramik Card²⁰, Health Card, etc. And he may also be a member of these schemes. Whatever schemes come from Jitesh bhai, he implements in his area. That is why he is connected to the people (Dinesh, 11 April 2013, reflection discussion).

In contrast, Keshav explained:

We sent the people to the parshad to get benefits. Whatever cards I have I get them distributed by the parshad (Keshav, 11 April 2013, reflection discussion).

Later, he added:

There was only one contractor for this card making. One person named Anil, took money from many people to the tune of 200 to 500 rupees, from many slums, except Ambedkar Nagar. This Anil guy did not deposit the applications. So the people are protesting that their cards have not been made. I have seen in many slums, the money has been taken to prepare the card (Keshav, 11 April 2013, reflection discussion).

Then Dinesh added ‘Amrit does the same thing’ (Dinesh, 11 April 2013, reflection discussion).

In their portrayal, Dinesh and Keshav made it clear that while taking money to make the cards is questionable, the thing that is most egregious is the deception of common people – posing as a ‘fixer’ to take advantage of the people’s trust, but then betraying that trust. In a system where people are reliant upon various forms of mediation, people are vulnerable to exploitation. ‘Fixers’ who exploit undermine the legitimacy of the whole system of social relations. This threatens to weaken the brokerage relations – however suboptimal people may find them – that remain the

²⁰ The *Shramik* Card guaranteed its holder a certain number of days paid labour.

primary method for common people to access state resources; and it also threatens to stigmatize those who perform this valuable service according to accepted ethical standards.

The aspect of the story concerning taking money for making cards must be looked at very carefully. On the one hand, ‘fixers’ are often unpaid or paid very little by the parties for whom they work (Manor, 2000, pp. 818–9), and they provide a valuable service to their clients for which it might be reasonable to expect remuneration. On the other hand, the formal regulations of schemes do not allow for such intermediaries, which makes the work of the ‘fixer’ technically illegal. Objectively, it might be labelled ‘corruption’. However, as Jauregui (2014) explains, people tend to see these moral issues as falling along a continuum. For people living in informal settlements, even ‘fixers’ themselves, agency is ‘provisional’ – that is, as Jauregui (2014, pp. 85–6) explains ‘ordinary social interactions interpretable as corruption may be substantively charged with a positive moral valence’ when everyday people take the limited actions available to them to ‘provide a social good’, given that their backs are against the wall. So while it might be acceptable for a ‘fixer’ to take money in some cases, it would be unacceptable in others, and the moral assessment of any given case would be inescapably contested.

To boost his own moral credentials, Keshav explained that he did not take money to make cards, but rather sent people directly to the *parshad* to get their cards made. However, it was clear that the active members of the Ambedkar Nagar settlement had a rocky relationship with their *parshad*, and they would avoid dealing with him if they had any other means of getting something done. This leads me to doubt Keshav’s narrative about sending people directly to the *parshad*. Rather, I suspect that this detail was thrown in primarily to deflect any suspicions about how Keshav made his own living as he was criticizing Amrit. In my assessment, both Keshav and Amrit held themselves to strict ethical codes in their work as ‘fixers’, even if they found fault in each other’s approaches.

The juxtaposition of these two ‘fixers’ gets to the heart of the debate in the literature between what deWit and Berner (2009, p. 933) call Manor’s (referring to (Manor, 2000)) ‘almost romantic notion of rural intermediaries who supposedly genuinely seek to serve the people and support the democratic process’ and their own cynicism that fixers are ‘rather local political entrepreneurs, balancing the need to make money with the need to remain popular, reliable and well-connected... the fixers’ role is

critical precisely in conditions where people are extremely poor and inequalities severe' (de Wit and Berner, 2009, p. 933).

Both Amrit and Keshav sincerely wanted to build up their communities and invest in local capacities to act. The SCSVUP project – and the SIC organization – created opportunities for them to pursue those goals in new ways. Rather than simply being a party functionary helping people access resources like the *Shramik* scheme (which provided livelihood tools like sewing machines and masonry kits), Amrit was able to be a leader of an SIC organization with a potential for building enough power to take action independent of party influence. Rather than tediously helping his neighbours meet with officials to access services, Keshav was able to be a leader in the SIC organization that helped people make their own political connections and take more effective public action. Both men contributed unique leadership to the SIC organization and helped it grow such that by the end of the project, the SIC organization was expanding and taking collective action on its own initiative. This is examined more closely in chapter 7.

I conclude that 'fixers' tend to be associated with greater civic agency in a settlement as well as the independence relational configuration with their *parshad*. It follows that 'fixers' are important local leaders in their settlements who can potentially make critical contributions to empowerment projects like the SCSVUP. The detailed examination of the two 'fixers' from this project suggests that they must be engaged on a case-by-case basis and understood deeply in the context of genuine, long-term relationships in order to have a positive impact on participants' agency. I argue in chapters 6 and 7 that in this project, the 'fixers'' own agency was strengthened through taking leadership roles in the new SIC organization even as their leadership mediation helped strengthen the agency of the other participants.

5.3. The role of NGO partners as mediators

The NGO partners understood themselves to be part of civil society and their role to be one of mediators between the urban poor and those tasked with providing services to them (i.e. government). They understood that mediation is linked with a patronage kind of system that is synonymous with corruption, but they were pragmatic. Ultimately, they did not want to undermine the relationship between constituents in the settlements and their *parshads*, but they wanted to supplement it with alternative

pathways to power and resources that would run through the NGOs as alternative mediators. This kind of mediation was fundamentally different from patronage, especially in that they intentionally shirked any obligation to maintain a long-term relationship.

For the NGO partners, participating in RAY in pursuit of housing rights was to be the entry point for empowerment, and it would hopefully lead to progress on the other issues as well. For Amrita:

Our main goal is organizing slum-dwellers. And to reach to the last poor person of the slum. But how can you reach the poor person if the person is not able to come out from his slum? So for that we have to contact that person who is able to bring them out... So that's why instead of reaching to the extremely poor people, we are trying to reach to the city leaders and the community leaders. So that if we will make them understand about what we are working for... then they will be able to convince these poor people. Ultimately they are empowering these people. So we are enabling them to empower themselves. That is the main motto of our work. Instead of going and asking them, discussing [with] them directly... we are just motivating the other people to motivate them (Amrita, 15 July 2013, facilitated system mapping exercise).

Amrita and Nidhi accepted that engaging in constant political action – pleading with councillors, mobilizing a visit to the Collector's office, demanding the right to land use and housing – is a basic part of life for people living in slums. Over the course of the SCSVUP project, they realized that the processes of engagement for the 'slum-dwellers' is different from how PRIA would typically engage in public action. While PRIA would usually engage with issues from a technical point of view, writing reports, holding public meetings to share information and discuss, lobbying politicians and officials on the basis of factual evidence in a way quite outside of formal politics and elections, people from slums, or political society, engage in struggles with politicians and officials that have direct authority over them, making emotional appeals and demands based on the realpolitik of vote banks.

While organizations like PRIA and Chetna (as well as SPARC) are not representative of the whole of Indian civil society, they are prominent actors within that civil society, and they have helped shape and construct Indian civil society through their actions and writings over the years. Without debating the precise nature of civil society in India, it is important to note that the NGO partners in this project saw themselves as representing civil society, and they expressed important points about what that meant

for them. Because the NGO partners self-identified with the term ‘civil society’, I find it helpful to use that term to refer to their particular relational patterns.

For Amrita:

Civil Society is a kind of bridge. It can work like an alarm, just to make noise to attract the attention of the policy-makers and other people... service providers. Just to raise their voices. ... [NGOs] influence policy because civil society is a kind of thing which exists in between the service [providers and] beneficiaries. So they can feel both the positions. So what they do, if they know what are the loopholes of all these policies, what kind of correction should be made in these policies so that they can be better reached to the poor people... First they observe the things. If the things are not reaching to the people, so they recommend (Amrita, 15 July 2013, facilitated system mapping exercise).

Given that the SCSVUP project puts Civil Society right in the title, we reflected on the notion of civil society over the course of the project. Amrita commented:

Civil society here, in this project, Strengthening Civil Society Voices on Urban Poverty, civil society means a group of people who are working for others, for the benefit of others. Like the SICs. The SICs are a kind of civil society. All the community based organizations are civil society. All the NGOs, the non-governmental organizations are civil society organizations. They all are working ... to provide benefit to the people of the slums (Amrita, 15 July 2013, facilitated system mapping exercise).

And yet, the SICs were fundamentally different from NGOs. She continued:

SICs... They are not completely civil society, but still they are struggling to become civil society. They are working. They are trying to work for their slum-dwellers. They are in the inception. They are just starting their journey of becoming civil society (Amrita, 15 July 2013, facilitated system mapping exercise).

I brought up the idea of a political society behavioural repertoire as a description of the relational patterns that people living in the settlements tended to adopt. They agreed that this was consistent with what we observed in our work, and didn’t necessarily mean there was a tension between civil and political societies. The SCSVUP project had certainly required PRIA and Chetna to find a way of collaborating with people who live in informal settlements. That is, we had to find a way of integrating the civil society approach with the political society approach. Reflecting on the extent to which this project had brought us out of the office and into the messy everyday politics of grassroots organizing, Amrita added jokingly ‘Our civil society is slowly becoming political society’ (Amrita, 15 July 2013, facilitated system mapping exercise).

In initiating a relationship with the seven settlements and helping form SICs, PRIA and Chetna became mediators. It is clear from statements above that the NGO

partners imagined themselves to be mediators in the facilitator sense: bringing residents of informal settlements together with government officials to facilitate transfer of information and the implementation of policy. However, project experiences quickly revealed that access to information was not the main problem for the participants, and the government had no intention of implementing the RAY policy. By becoming partners with the SIC members, the NGOs were entering the messy reality of political society, and this required a different kind of mediation: organizing.

Rather than mediating between people living in informal settlements and service providers, PRIA, Chetna, and I came to mediate the forming of relationships amongst the participants from the settlements. We did not simply gather people from the settlements for interactions with government. Instead, we organized the participants into SIC groups and began organizing with the participants around the issues that resonated – namely housing rights. At that point, it was no longer possible to advocate for the interests of the people from the settlements. At that point, we were in it together – reliant upon them to advance our interests as they were reliant upon us to advance theirs.

The first lesson came from the threatening reaction from the *parshad* of Hari Bhumi Ward. This demonstrated that empowerment for the project participants would mean altering the existing power landscape, and this would not be without risk. The *parshad* did not perceive us or the project to be power-neutral. Empowerment for the participants would not be achieved by brokering some dialogue as if the two sides already had equal power. Instead, in order to work for the empowerment of the participants, we had to become their partners. We had to risk our own power and position in order to pursue our joint objectives.

Another important learning moment was when the information boards were placed in the seven settlements. As described in box 4 of chapter 4, the boards were torn down in Shiv Nagar 1. Perhaps unintentionally, PRIA was projecting a message in a political idiom that suggested they were reliable patron-mediators. However, they consistently contradicted this message. The SIC members often requested PRIA make ID cards for them that would declare them members of a local association partnering with PRIA. PRIA rejected this idea, which, from their perspective, seemed implausible and irrelevant. Such an ID card would not carry any official meaning or weight, and this made it seem pointless to the NGO partners. To the SIC members, this could have brought a great deal of informal legitimacy. Instead, PRIA planned to provide the SICs

with letterheads, which they could use to submit paperwork to government officials. In the end, this was not a priority for them, and the letterheads were never delivered.

In this way, even as the organizing practice required us to be partner-mediators, the patronage-dominated context put pressure on us to take on the role of patron-mediators. In the end, we managed to negotiate a workable dynamic. Rather than mediating between the settlements and government service providers, we ended up being organizing partners with the SICs. We mediated so as to facilitate new relationships between the SIC members of the different settlements. We mediated by helping them prepare for public actions (analysed in chapter 7). We mediated by entering into genuine relationships with them, bringing them into the NGO world and spending a great deal of time in the world of the settlements. The way we functioned as organizers and mediators is analysed in greater detail in chapter 7, but what is important to note here is that this mediation functioned differently from the kinds of patronage dynamics that existed between the settlement residents and their *parshads*, the local ‘fixers’ and any other patrons before the project. We were neither formal connections to the state like the *parshads* were nor fully embedded stakeholders like the ‘fixers’. Our interest was to align the interests of the other stakeholders, to strengthen the agency of the SIC members, and to encourage successful implementation of the RAY policy. Our mediating role created new relationships through which new relational dynamics were lived out that strengthened agency. That they strengthened agency is evidenced by the network analysis in the next chapter and the collective actions made possible by them (discussed in chapter 7).

5.4. Conclusion:

This chapter has explored the issue of mediation as a factor that impacts agency for people living in informal settlements. I provided evidence on the patronage relationships between settlement residents and their elected representatives; the role of local ‘fixers’ like Amrit and Keshav; and the mediating role played by PRIA, Chetna, and myself. In each case, I explored how things changed in response to the project intervention; especially the extent to which agency was strengthened.

This chapter has provided a framework for understanding one of the key patronage-type relationships for people living in informal settlements – that of their elected local representative, who functions as their primary access to the state. I drew on

the evidence from the ten settlements PRIA, Chetna, and I attempted to connect with for the SCSVUP project to highlight four common relational configurations that can exist between the representatives and their constituents: domination, neglect, dependency, and freedom/independence. For each of the project settlements, I provided a classification for their relational configuration, and I explored the impact of that configuration on agency. Further, I drew tentative conclusions about how those patronage relationships evolved over the course of the SCSVUP project. Finally, I drew conclusions about promising strategies for strengthening agency depending on the relational configuration in the settlement.

In order to effectively craft a project that strengthens agency for people living in informal settlements, researchers and NGO partners must be aware that such contexts are dynamic and complex. Residents of informal settlements are likely to have an established relationship with their *parshad* that falls into one of the four dynamic configurations mentioned above. It is imperative for any intervention that mechanisms be devised to monitor the power landscapes in the context as well as to determine the relational configurations in which the participants operate. Only then can effective strategies be co-created that can account for the unique exigencies of social change in complex social systems.

Beyond this, I have argued that effective local ‘fixers’ are associated with better agency outcomes. Accepting that ‘fixers’ have the potential to exacerbate and perpetuate inequalities, I have argued that it is important to also take into account the fact that they are leaders and members of their settlement communities. They are not outsiders, in contrast to other patrons. As such, they face a complex set of incentives. They undoubtedly benefit individually from their brokerage positions, but given the provisional nature of agency in informal settlements, it is common for both ‘fixers’ and other community members to respect and appreciate their leadership.

Both of the ‘fixers’ I discussed in this chapter had achieved personal advancement through their roles as ‘fixers’, but both displayed genuine concern for the wellbeing of their communities. Amrit saw his brokerage leadership style as leading to greater access to resources for all members of his settlement, even if they could not be bothered to be civically engaged. Keshav, on the other hand, insisted on building up leadership in the other members of his community so that he did not need to mediate all transactions. Both worked for their self-interests and the public interests of their communities. Both were also associated with independence styles of patronage

relationships with their respective *parshads*. It is surely no coincidence that the additional patronage type relationships they maintained were associated with less dependence on the *parshad* in their settlements. Nevertheless, the project failed to offer clear universal pathways to achieving this independence. Shifting patronage dynamics must be done incrementally and delicately, taking into account the specific initial relational configurations for each group.

NGO partners taking on mediating roles is another layer of changing relational dynamics. To strengthen agency for participants from informal settlements, NGOs must go further than simply providing information or bringing different parties together for a facilitated discussion. This project demonstrated the need for NGO partners to engage in protracted genuine relationships with participants. However, outsiders such as NGO partners or academic researchers are likely to become a form of mediator through such relationships. Participants are likely to understand these new relationships to be mediating relationships, even if the outsiders are not aware. Thus, expectations and obligations must be clearly negotiated. It further accentuates the need for such partnership relationships to be genuine and egalitarian, to address the tendency for the 'system' to swap them out for other forms of patronage.

The relationships formed through the SCSVUP project afforded a co-created organizing that goes further than time-bound or issue-bound mobilising. By getting out of the office and finding a place in the messy world of political society, the NGO partners were able to bridge the distance between their expression of civil society and political society. Together, we were able to understand the logic of agency for settlement residents, work with local leaders to strengthen leadership capacities through taking action, and use our own positions of relative power to advance the interests of the participants as our own interests. Further reflections on this organizing process can be found in chapter 8.

The issue of mediation also makes clear that in the context of complex social systems, relational dynamics and relational structures co-evolve. The new relationships formed through the SCSVUP project created new possibilities for relational dynamics, including the possibility that the NGO partners could become mediators. NGO mediation, then, began to interact with other forms of mediation to change how participants related to their *parshads* as well as local 'fixers'. In this and the previous chapters, I have provided analysis on relational dynamics and how they changed over time. In the next chapter, I shift the focus to seeing the relational structures as they

change over time, keeping in mind the notion that the relational dynamics and the relational structures were co-evolving simultaneously.

Chapter 6 - Relational Structures

In chapter 4, I introduced the main participants from the informal settlements and explored their relational dynamics as they evolved over the course of the SCSVUP project. I applied a complex systems lens and made the case that changes in dynamics could not completely be explained without tools for accounting for structural changes as well. Chapter 5 examined specific relational dynamics in greater detail, noting that the ‘patronage’ form includes different kinds of mediating relationships from those between citizen and state, to those between local residents and local ‘fixers’, and even those between residents and NGOs or researchers who engage in project-based interventions. I concluded with the observation that such forms of mediation lie at the complex intersection between dynamics and structures as they co-evolve.

In this chapter, I am finally able to present tools and data regarding the relational structures as they changed over the course of the SCSVUP project. In this chapter, I will focus mainly on this structural aspect of social change. However, I make the caveat that changes in agency cannot be explained by structural changes alone. After continuing in the next chapter to explore the new forms of collective action that occurred through the project, I will attempt to synthesise the dynamical and the structural aspects into an understanding of social change as system change.

In this chapter, I draw on social network data for the participants from the informal settlements. A social network is a way of depicting important aspects of the structure of a system. By carrying out a survey of participants about their important social relations, I was able to generate a map of the social system that was accessible to the participants. I was also able to reconstruct a baseline network to demonstrate how new relationships formed through the SCSVUP had changed the system. Namely, I showed that by intentionally forming SIC groups in the seven settlements, what had previously been a disparate and sparsely connected set of people came to take on the form of an integrated, coherent organization. I was able to draw on concepts from complex networks science to explain this ‘phase change’ process and to suggest that this new organization remained fragile at the end of the project.

6.1. The Social Network Data

The social network data on which this chapter's analysis is based was collected via a survey asking respondents to list the people with whom they had interacted in the last week and month, whether the person lived in the settlement or outside, and what the general purpose of the interaction was.

These questions were purposefully broad so as not to be leading. They attempted to capture the relationships that the respondents felt were most meaningful. Taken as a whole, the data represents a broad estimate of the relevant social structures for the people living in the participating settlements. I was not able to make a census of the SIC members, nor of the entire settlement populations. The survey involved a purposeful sample targeted toward those members of the settlements who were aware of and engaged in the SIC groups and the activities of the SCSVUP project. The network diagrams and the metrics represent an estimate of the relational structures that the participants felt were relevant to their lives – since these were the relationships they explicitly mentioned.

By 'taken as a whole' I mean considering all the people mentioned in the data. Most of the people the respondents named were not subsequently interviewed to see whether or not the relationship was reciprocated. This is the sense in which the 'whole' data set is a sample – a sample of relationships in a larger relational world where an unknown number of additional relationships exist. Such network samples pose great challenges to social network analytical calculations. However, they were sufficient for visual analysis and for some 'broad brush-stroke' discussions held with participants.

In my own analysis for this chapter, I made use of the subset of data made up only of respondents. By excluding nodes that were not interviewed, I essentially move from a sample of a larger population of relationships to a small, bounded population of relationships for which I have a census. Considering the universe of only the people I interviewed allows me to use standard social network analysis metrics. Rather than making the leap to suggesting that patterns observed in this small universe shed light on what was happening in the full population of residents from across these seven settlements, I simply argue that patterns observed can reasonably be taken to represent patterns amongst project participants. As a reminder, 36 people were interviewed representing each of the seven settlements, of which 23 were SIC members. Those 23 SIC members made up exactly half of the total 46 SIC members.

Further, the simple questionnaire included qualitative data on the meaning of the reported social ties, which allows the quantitative social network analysis to contribute to and corroborate the other forms of inquiry in this thesis. Respondents listed a broad array of relationship types, including family members, friends, neighbours, work colleagues, members of various local NGOs (including PRIA and Chetna), and connections to political parties and other patrons. It was also clear from these responses which relationships had formed only after forming the SIC groups and beginning the activities of the SCSVUP project. This created the possibility for the one-time ‘snapshot’ to afford a retrospective estimate of the network(s) before the intervention (forming the SICs and beginning the activities of the SCSVUP project).

6.2. Use of social network analysis by the SIC members

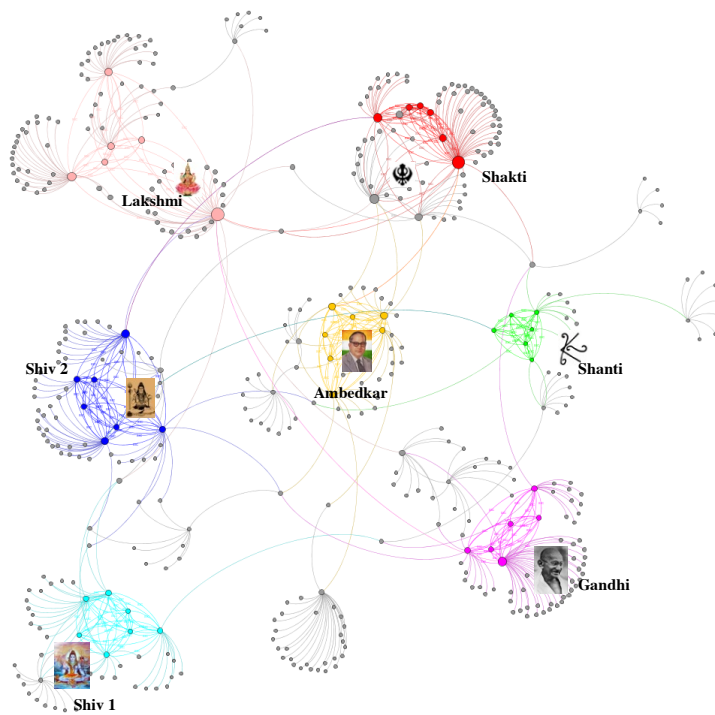
First and foremost, the networks were intended to be meaningful to the SIC members as part of their organizing activity. Seeing their position within their social networks, and the changes that had occurred since beginning the SCSVUP project, contributed to helping the SIC members learn from their experiences, more effectively plan collective action, and have a more tangible feeling of their accomplishments. Social change is usually a slow process. The day-to-day monotony of organizing can be demoralizing without a tangible sense that one is having an impact. Seeing and collectively making sense of social networks can expand participants’ perspectives beyond their own personal experience and can make visible and tangible system-level changes that might not have been acutely felt.

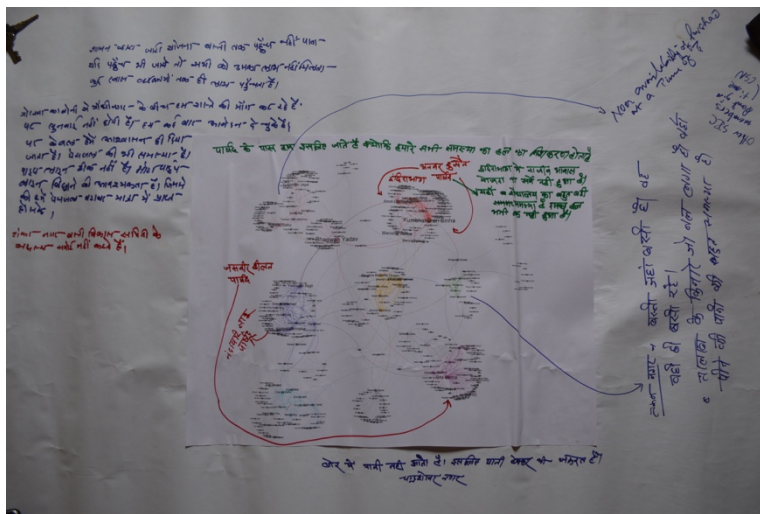
I discussed the networks and conducted visual analysis with participants on two occasions. Firstly, I met with the SIC members from Ambedkar Nagar who were the most active leaders from any settlement. They easily understood the importance of the networks and used them to inform their strategy for leadership. Later, after the central SIC steering community, the *Janjagran* Samiti, was formed, I facilitated a discussion of the networks with those members in the context of their first planning meeting (see figure 9).

Figure 9. Participants discussing their social networks



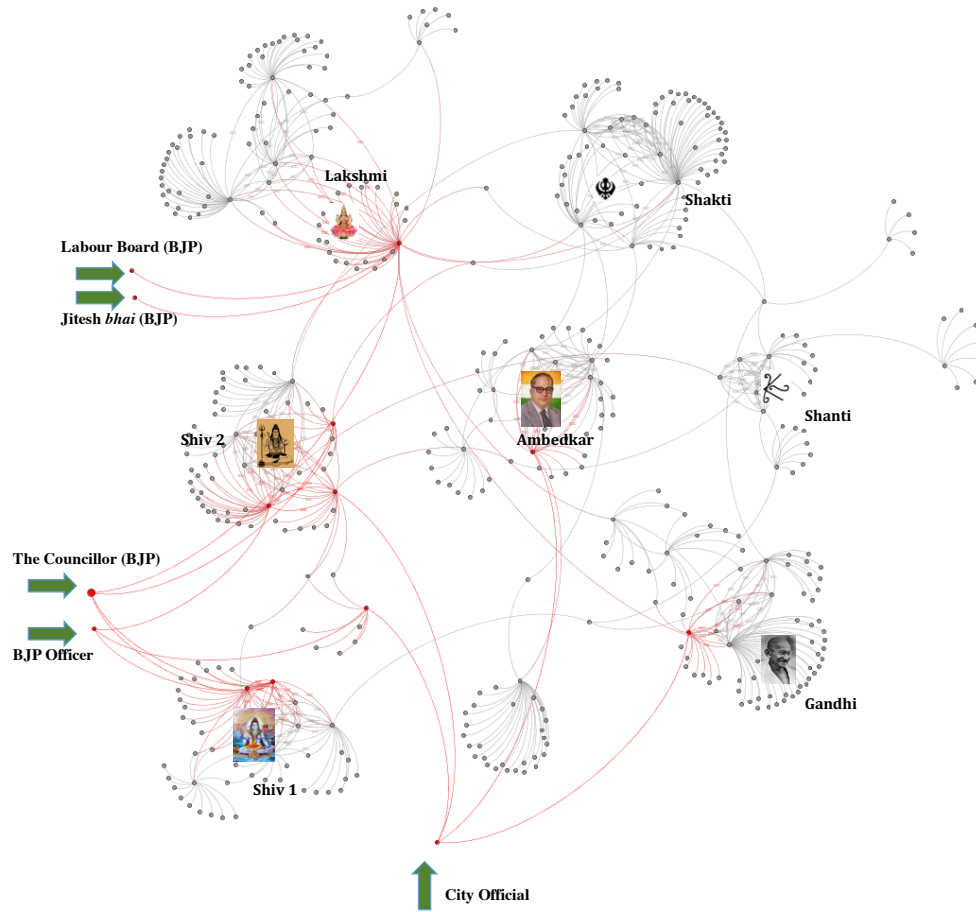
Figure 10. Social network of the 7 SIC settlements





During the discussion with the Ambedkar Nagar SIC members, they immediately noticed that they occupied the centre of the network. This confirmed their understanding that they were the strongest leaders among the SIC participants, and this strengthened their resolve to reach out to weaker groups, like Shanti Nagar. During the larger group discussions, it was clear to all the participants that Shanti Nagar was being left behind. The fact that they had few visible connections and were not connected to either Keshav or Amrit (the two main ‘fixer’-leaders) confirmed the general feeling that Shanti Nagar was not developing as quickly as some of the other SIC groups.

Figure 12. 'Flow' of resources through the social network



In addition to the main social network (figure 10), I also printed figure 12 on large paper and discussed it with the participants. Figure 12 indicates five important actors to whom respondents were connected. These actors were reported as important sources of resources, and were either powerful members of a political party, a party-based organization, or an official in the municipal corporation. They are indicated in figure 12 with orange arrows. Any node directly linked with one of those five 'patron' nodes is represented by a red dot. The connections directly to the 'patron' nodes as well as the second order connections are represented by red lines. This network allowed participants to see where they were (or were not) connected to resources through their SIC relationships. Again, this network makes visible where some participants were relatively excluded from accessing important resources, as well as the fact that some settlements as a whole were relatively isolated – most notably Shanti Nagar and Shakti

Nagar. Neither of them had direct links to a powerful ‘patron’, and according to this network, they had only 3 indirect links between them.

In addition to these networks, the SIC members were shown a reconstructed ‘baseline’ network depicting their social network before the start of the SCSVUP project. This reconstruction was created by simply removing those connections that were reported as having been formed during the activity of the SCSVUP project. Since only those links that were clearly formed after the intervention were removed, the comparison between the reconstructed ‘baseline’ and the current network offers a conservative estimate of the impact of the intervention – that is, since I only removed the most obviously new ties, the ‘baseline’ data includes some ties that might also have been formed as a result of the intervention, meaning the comparison is likely to underestimate the change over time. I explore this issue with more analytical precision below.

6.3. Social Network Analysis and Changing Relational Structures

The network printed and presented to the participants was rather messy, and because it included nodes for many people who did not get the chance to report their own connections, it risks being misleading. A technical social network analysis should consider the network only of those who responded. Figures 13 and 14 are representations of that network – respectively, the reconstructed ‘baseline’ estimate of what the network looked like as of October 2012, before SICs were formed, and the network as reported during the survey in February 2013.

Figure 13. Social Network of Interviewed Participants Before Forming SICs

Social Network of Interviewed Participants, Before Forming SICs

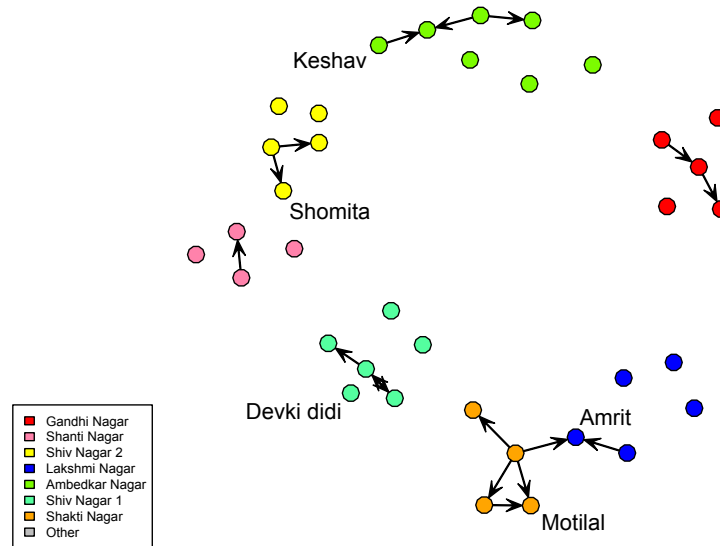
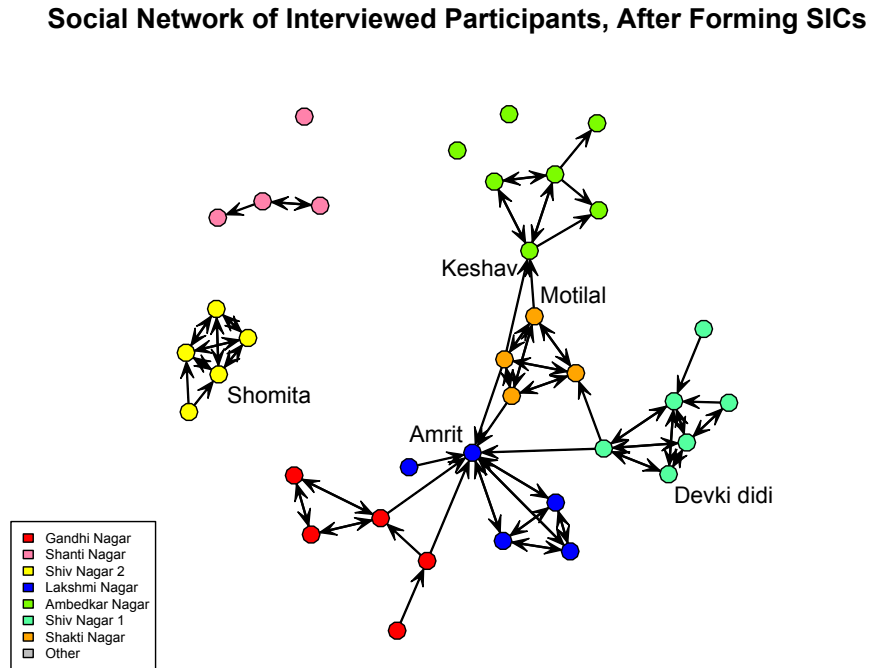


Figure 14. Social network of interviewed participants after forming SICs



Krackhardt's (1994) metrics for understanding connectedness and hierarchy offer a standard way of interrogating structural features of informal organizations like the SIC groups. He proposed four metrics that capture different aspects of how networked organizations function: Connectedness, Hierarchy, Efficiency, and Least Upper Boundedness. A fifth measure, Graph Density, is related to these (Butts, 2015).

Connectedness intuitively captures the proportion of pairs of points that are mutually connected (Krackhardt et al., 1994, p. 96). Graph **hierarchy** captures the extent to which connections in the network go in a preferred hierarchical direction (Krackhardt et al., 1994, p. 97). A purely hierarchical network would have no symmetrical links and thus would have a hierarchy score of 1.

Graph **efficiency** is less intuitive and measures the 'social cost' of 'excess' links, i.e. links above and beyond the absolute minimum necessary to allow every node to be reachable by every other node (Krackhardt et al., 1994, p. 97). Efficiency would be 1 in the case of a perfectly hierarchical 'outtree' graph. Krackhardt cautions that efficiency only captures the 'cost' of excess ties, not the 'benefit'. He notes that 'graph efficient'

organizations are brittle, and perfect efficiency is not actually desirable. A desirable ‘graph efficiency’ would allow a balance between order and flexibility.

Least Upper Boundedness (or **lubness**) provides insight into how command or authority functions in the networked organization (Krackhardt et al., 1994, p. 99). A ‘least upper bound’ is a person, up the hierarchy, who is shared by two respondents such that both of them would ‘defer’ to that person’s authority. A higher lubness score would suggest a more streamlined leadership structure within the organization. Again, the ideal organization would not necessarily have a high lubness score. An ideal lubness score for an organization would balance a need for clear leadership with a need for shared leadership. This, of course, should depend on the context. There is no abstract ideal lubness score.

Finally, graph density is often considered alongside Krackhardt’s original four metrics. Graph **density** provides the ratio of observed ties to possible ties. In a completely dense network, everyone would have an individual relationship with everyone else. Density is clearly related to both connectedness and efficiency, but it is a more straightforward measure. Connectedness considers two people to be connected if they share a mutual connection, whereas density considers each pair individually. Efficiency would be inversely related to density, but again, efficiency considers two people to have sufficient connection if they are connected by a mutual tie, whereas density considers each pair in isolation.

Table 3. Network-level metrics before and after SIC formation

	Before SIC Formation	After SIC Formation
Connectedness	0.049206349	0.496825397
Efficiency	0.957446809	0.911073826
Hierarchy	NULL	NULL
Lubness	0.625	0.643109541
Graph Density	0.013492063	0.065873016

Taken together, the five metrics provide a good characterization of a network. Table 3 presents the five metrics for the participant network (only those interviewed). The first thing to notice is that connectedness increased dramatically. Figure 13 shows that before intentionally forming SIC groups in the seven settlements, the network was highly disconnected. In fact, there was only one case of inter-settlement connection before the project: someone in Shakti Nagar whom Amrit knew through his work. From

the perspective of complex networks, this indicates the phenomenon of percolation: the new relationships resulted in a ‘phase change’ whereby the network went from being mostly disconnected to mostly connected. This is discussed in greater detail in the section below.

Efficiency decreased slightly, but great care must be taken in interpreting this measure. The calculation for efficiency, by definition, cannot account for disconnected graph components. It merely calculates the degree of ‘excess’ connection among the component that is connected, i.e. reciprocal and non-hierarchical structures. In the ‘baseline’ network, there was no ‘giant component’, only several disconnected components. In any case, as mentioned above, a high graph efficiency is not necessarily desirable, and the lower efficiency of the network as reported indicates that the many new connections that formed carried very little ‘social cost’. In other words, the decrease in graph efficiency suggests that the new connections added some redundancy (Ahern, 2011), which is necessary for the resilience of the new SIC organization.

Least upper boundedness increased, but only to about 0.54. This indicates that a leadership structure did develop and strengthen as the SIC groups were formed, but as of February 2012, no single person or group of people was dominant. This suggests that, even as Keshav and Amrit were ‘fixers’ and strong leaders, they did not dominate the fledgling SIC organization. I take this as corroborating evidence for Keshav’s view that stronger distributed leadership was needed. The SIC groups simply did not have the structure of a rigid hierarchical, top-down organization, and, for better or worse, its effectiveness and long-term success would require members from each SIC group to step up and take responsibility as leaders.

Finally, the graph density increased slightly after forming the SICs, but figure 14 shows that the network was still rather sparse. Notably, the SICs did not become one homogeneous group. They remained dense clusters weakly connected to each other through the smaller number of very active SIC members. Beyond this, and perhaps equally important, visual inspection of figures 13 and 14 suggests that forming SICs significantly changed relationship structures within the settlements, not only between settlements. It is often assumed that informal settlements are places of dense ties of mutual dependence. While there were clear community clusters in each settlement, forming the SICs seems to have catalysed new and stronger relationships amongst people living in the same settlement. The participants may have been neighbours for many years, but working together as SIC members and as part of the SCSVUP project

seems to have brought them closer together. The social network suggests that these (new) relationships became more egalitarian, with most people now claiming to have relationships with most others from their settlement. This is an important finding, and it has implications for agency – especially around capacities to take collective action. The strengthening of intra-settlement ties over the course of the SCSVUP project constitutes a strengthening of agency, and it corroborates the subjective sense of strengthened agency reported by many of the participants.

6.3.1. Individual Level Metrics

In addition to considering the participants' network as a whole, it is useful to consider the impact of forming the SIC groups on individual participants. Table 4 provides three standard measures of centrality for nodes in a network: degree, betweenness, and closeness.

Degree is simply the number of other nodes that a given node is connected to. Higher degree implies that a node is 'important' because they have many connections. Betweenness centrality captures the proportion of pathways between each other pair of nodes on which that node lies (Butts, 2015, pp. 13–14). This metric captures the effect of being a 'middle man' between lots of other people and implies a node is 'important' because they act as a bridge or broker between other pairs of nodes.

Closeness centrality captures how many steps away a node is from each other node, on average (Butts, 2015, pp. 32–33). Intuitively, a higher closeness centrality implies a node is 'important' because they can reach the other nodes in a relatively small number of steps. Alternatively, information or resources have less social distance to travel. For a node with no connections, closeness centrality is undefined.

Table 4. Individual Network Metrics, Before and After SIC Formation

Before SIC Formation (Baseline)					After SIC Formation (As Reported)				
ID	Name	Degree	Betweenness	Closeness	ID	Name	Degree	Betweenness	Closeness
2	Amrit	2	0	0.00238095	2	Amrit	12	48	0.00104167
14		2	0	0.00262467	14		8	11.5	0.0018315
3		4	0	0.00294118	3		8	24	0.00147059
13		1	0	0.00238095	13		8	24.5	0.00182815
					16		8	65	0.00187266
5		1	0	0.00238095	5		7	48	0.00145138
4	Keshav	1	0	0.0025	4	Keshav	7	40.5	0.00107643
1		2	0	0.0025	1		7	4	0.00145985
6	Motilal	2	0	0.00238095	6	Motilal	7	20	0.00146199
12	Shomita	1	0	0.00238095	12	Shomita	7	1	0.00104167
9		1	0	0.00238095	9		7	1	0.00104167
23		2	0	0.00263158	23		6	12.5	0.00107759
					10		6	0	0.00104167
					22		6	0	0.00104167
18		1	0	0.00238095	18		6	12	0.0011534
					20		6	0	0.00104167
					15	Devki didi	6	0	0.00182815
					11		6	0	0.00104167
					21		6	0	0.00104167
					19		4	0	0.00114811
					24		4	0	0.00107527
					17		4	0	0.00114811
25		3	1	0.00263158	25		3	0	0.00178253
35		2	1	0.0025	35		3	7	0.00119474
7		1	0	0.0025	7		3	1	0.00100806
27		2	0	0.00238095	27		2	0	0.00094697
					8		2	0	0.00100705
34		2	0	0.00263158	34		2	0	0.00107527
36		1	0	0.00262467	36		1	0	0.00123153
31		1	0	0.0025	31		1	0	0.00107411
30		1	0	0.00238095	30		1	0	0.00094697
32		1	0	0.00238095	32		1	0	0.00094697
					26		1	0	0.0018797

These three metrics can reveal quite a bit about the role played by a given node in a social system. Consider the changes for the named SIC members in figures 13 and 14. As detailed in chapters 4 and 5, Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar and Keshav from Ambedkar Nagar are both ‘fixers’ within the network. Before the start of the SCSVUP project, they had almost no contact with people from any of the other settlements. After forming the SICs, Amrit had 12 connections to other interviewed participants, while Keshav had seven. Amrit had the highest of anyone in the network, and Keshav was also among the highest.

Amrit’s betweenness centrality was the second highest, at 48. This suggests he was the participant best positioned for leadership and influence within the network. Keshav also had very high betweenness (40.5), which is commensurate with his role as ‘fixer’ and his leadership position within his community. Note that Keshav also explicitly stated that his preferred leadership style was to avoid making himself a broker, but to foster distributed leadership among the people around him. This might

explain why his centrality measures are high, but not the absolute highest in the network.

Closeness centrality scores tell a more nuanced story. Neither Keshav nor Amrit have particularly high closeness centrality. This seems to be an artefact of their positionality – many people surveyed named them, but they did not name many other people in the survey. It is clear that between October and February, many new relationships were developed. This led to the formation of a ‘giant component’ in the network – the rapid change from a set of disconnected communities to a single community weakly held together but with stronger sub-communities. As of February, most of the ties involving Amrit and Keshav were directed towards them. That is, the other respondents were naming them as important contacts more often than they were reciprocating. This directionality means that it had become easier for the others to access each other through Amrit and Keshav, but not necessarily easier for Amrit and Keshav to access everyone, since they had become two ‘peaks’ of a nascent hierarchy.

Meanwhile, Motilal, Shomita, and Devki *didi* also became much more central to the network after forming the SICs. Devki was a ‘fixer’ herself, but she intentionally stopped participating in SIC activities by March. Motilal and Shomita represent an ‘average’ kind of participant that came into the project with little experience and few skills for organizing or taking collective action. They had few connections to powerful actors. After forming the SIC groups, they dramatically increased their number of connections across neighbourhoods (though Shomita remained disconnected at the time of the survey) and increased their positional power in the social system. Motilal’s betweenness centrality jumped from one to 20 after forming the SIC groups.

The social network analysis reveals several important things about how forming the SIC groups impacted social structure. Firstly, the numbers and visual inspection of figures 13 and 14 suggest that forming SICs and participating in the SCSVUP project initiated a ‘phase change’ in the network through which seven individual communities became a nascent organization. This new organization exhibited a distributed leadership structure, with the two ‘fixers’ identified in chapters 4 and 5 assuming central roles. The numbers also suggest that both ‘average’ participants and the ‘fixers’ benefited from these new relationships, though in qualitatively different ways. The more experienced ‘fixers’ extended their reach as leaders beyond their own settlements. Meanwhile the ‘average’ participants dramatically increased their positional power, with some clearly

becoming leaders within their settlements and brokers between their settlements and outside resources for the first time.

6.4. Social Networks and Agency

Social networks are one form of depicting social systems, i.e. articulating the components of the social system and their relationships to one another. While any given network is a snapshot of the system, there are two ways of using them to investigate dynamics. Firstly, it is possible to take multiple snapshots – to consider dynamics of the network. In this thesis, a ‘baseline’ network was reconstructed based on the fact that certain reported relationships had clearly been formed as a result of the SCSVUP project’s intervention. By considering the reported purposes of interactions in the survey, it was clear that some relationships had been initiated by the project and had not existed before. I created the reconstructed ‘baseline’ by removing only these obviously new relationships.

Secondly, metrics can be calculated that offer clues to dynamics on the network at the time of the snapshot. In this case, Krackhardt’s four metrics showed a picture of a nascent organization that had recently experienced a ‘phase change’ from seven disconnected networks to a single coherent organization with only two components remaining disconnected. They also indicated an organization in need of strong distributed leadership, since the connection between the communities was still largely dependent on the newly active brokers. Keshav and Amrit, whom we already saw to be ‘fixers’, appeared to be quite central within the network. In addition to the fact that they have high centrality measures, we also saw that, qualitatively, they are connected to powerful patrons, and that important resources enter the network through them to be distributed to the others.

In short, the social networks affirm the agency of the ‘fixers’ and highlight that their position (and thus agency) had been strengthened by the new connections. Both Keshav and Amrit became highly central in this network, and while we know they had long been brokers in their own settlements, they became brokers across these seven settlements. But the networks also suggest that non-‘fixer’ participants also strengthened their agency. For example, by participating in the SCSVUP project and becoming SIC members, Motilal and Devki *didi* became brokers between their communities and the wider society. They came to connect their communities to the

resources that can now be accessed through Keshav, Amrit, and their patrons. They also came to occupy positions within a nascent organizational structure that makes possible and also demands their leadership. The social networks tell us explicitly that an informal organization existed by February 2013, that did not exist before the start of the project in October 2012, and that to be sustainable, those newly central, non-‘fixer’ SIC members would need to step up as leaders to coordinate collective action and make the changes demonstrated by these networks sustainable. By considering the dynamics of and dynamics on the network, we can see that the existence and persistence of ties depends on the substance of the relationships. Without continued interactions such as accessing resources or taking action, the ties would be likely to atrophy, breaking the new organisation back into disconnected pieces.

Furthermore, this analysis was made accessible to the participants through facilitated discussions. The participants were able to see their changing positions within the network. They were able to see how resources tended to flow into their communities. They were able to use these insights to inform their decisions about how to take collective action (see section 6.2.). For example, they were able to see that some settlements were not developing as well as others. Shanti Nagar can be seen to be separated from the ‘giant component’ in figure 14, and this can also be inferred from figures 10 and 12, which the participants examined collectively (see box 7). As a result, the social network analysis goes beyond documenting the strengthening of agency over the course of the SCSVUP. The data and findings, as knowledge, served to further strengthen agency, as the participants used this new knowledge to take more effective action.

6.5. Social Networks and Complexity

Complex networks science provides us with the concept of percolation – the idea that connectivity and flow dynamics change as a network evolves over time. It also suggests that this change happens in a non-linear fashion. In a disconnected graph, new connections have very little effect on the dynamics of the whole network, but at some point, a tipping point can be reached after which the disconnected graph rapidly congeals into a largely interconnected ‘giant component’ (see section 2.6.1.).

The observed social network demonstrates that forming the SIC groups brought about the interconnection of previously disconnected networks in the seven settlements

to form a ‘giant component’. The fact that this occurred has implications going forward. Firstly, it implies that the new connections formed through the SCSVUP project did not simply benefit the individual participants. The new connections between the individual participants led to the emergence of an entity (visible in figure 14), the SIC organization, that affords qualitatively different processes from what existed previously – for example, a sense of belonging and the ability to take collective action (see sections 7.2.2. and 7.2.3.). Secondly, it implies that the emergent SIC organization remained quite brittle. Much of the new relationships passed through either Amrit or Keshav. If a small number of the new connections faded after the conclusion of the project, the ‘giant component’ would disintegrate.

The concepts of percolation and the ‘giant component’ are applied here in a novel way, which provides insight into the nascent SIC organization and compliments the qualitative understanding generated by the other observational methods. One of the most important contributions of this synthesized qualitative and quantitative understanding of the SIC organization is that it allowed the participants to see, objectively, the progress they had made in real time. While the progress was not necessarily radical systemic social change, it was a significant change. Seeing objective and quantitative evidence of that change was a great affirmation for the participants at the end of a difficult project year, and it helped them feel certain about what they were doing. This also addresses the gap in literature around operationalising complex networks concepts for empirical study of social change processes.

6.6. Conclusions:

This chapter has presented an analysis of the SCSVUP project participants’ social structures as they evolved over the course of the project. This analysis was based on data collected through a simple survey of active residents from the seven participating informal settlements. Using qualitative information about the nature of reported relationships, I reconstructed a ‘baseline’ network by removing connections that had clearly been formed as a result of participation in the project. This allowed me to document changes to the network over time and demonstrate the impact of forming SIC groups on agency.

The social networks were important in two ways. Firstly, they were presented to the participants and analysed in a participatory way as part of the project. Participants

were able to see themselves as part of a nascent organization that was growing, and they were able to feel certain about the changes their organizing was creating. While it is not reasonable to expect radical change over only one year of organizing work, using social networks allowed participants to see and quantify the incremental changes they had affected – changes that were significant.

Secondly, analysing the evolving social networks provides insight into how change action can impact social structure as well as how changing social structure impacts agency. In chapter 5, I argued that the maxim of networking for social change should be nuanced to recognize that new relationships have a nonlinear impact on the wider system. In this chapter, I provide a detailed account of how new relationships developed and their impact on the participants. Individuals such as Keshav and Amrit, who came into the project with relatively high individual agency benefited by extending their leadership into new settlements and by becoming leaders of the emergent SIC organization. Individuals like Shomita, who came into the project with more limited agency, limited experience with public action, and limited connections benefited by building new connections through which they and their communities could access resources as well as by becoming brokers between their communities and powerful outsiders.

These findings suggest that it is not simply ‘networking’ that strengthens agency, but organizing in such a way as to bring disparate groups of individuals together into a coherent collective entity. This chapter has demonstrated that the process of forming such a new entity is non-linear; it emerges through a phase change as the disparate groups suddenly become connected into a giant component. This chapter also demonstrates areas of risk for emergent organizations. Resilience comes from redundancy (Ahern, 2011) and distributed leadership (Taylor et al., 2012; Wallace and Wallace, 2008, p. 11). While new relationships remain tenuous and sparse, emergent organizations are likely to be fragile. In a project context that is time-bound, there is a high risk that emergent organizations will dissolve after the end of project activities if they have not yet reached a resilient state.

This chapter has provided analysis of evolving social structures that compliments the analysis of evolving social dynamics from chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 4, I argued that the new relationships formed during the SCSVUP project created the conditions for new ways of relating that could strengthen agency. In this chapter, I have presented those new relationships as structural changes to the social system with an

independent contribution to individual and collective agency. That new relational context in which new relational dynamics were possible is the emergent SIC organization depicted in this chapter. These two arenas of change did not happen separately, nor even in parallel. They happened simultaneously as system dynamics and structures co-evolved. In the next chapter I examine new forms of collective action that participants were able to carry out in the context of their emergent SIC organization.

Chapter 7 - Collective Action

This chapter explores the impact of collective action on agency. I describe two major public actions carried out as part of the SCSVUP project and trace their impact on the social system via the key systemic features I have described so far: the relational dynamics, the relational structures (networks), and mediation processes.

After forming the SICs in the seven neighbourhoods, the participants and the NGO partners jointly carried out two public events: a Media Meet with journalists from several of Raipur's newspapers and a City Consultation with several important stakeholders around the issues of urban poverty and the RAY policy. This chapter examines those two events, including the effort that went into preparing for them and reflecting on them, and explores the extent to which action taken as part of the SCSVUP project created social change and strengthened participants' agency. The analysis in this chapter draws on transcripts from the events, preparation activities, reflection discussions among the NGO partners, reflection discussions among the SIC members, and the participatory NetMap exercises which also functioned as reflection sessions near the end of the project.

Through intentionally telling their new story to the media at the Media Meet and engaging in discussions with policymakers at the City Consultation, the SIC members performed a new relational dynamic that was potentially more empowering than their prior ways of relating. These were also attempts to change dynamics of mediation from dependence on patronage from politicians to more of a co-production arrangement. For example, rather than using the narrative of 'poor slum-dwellers need help from government and urge them to take action on the RAY policy' the SIC members attempted a narrative of 'local residents bring contextual knowledge to help government meet its obligations in implementing the participatory RAY policy'. According to the new narrative, patrons would function less in mediating between the state and the settlements, whereas the new SIC groups would function more. Additionally, the SIC members reported that the two actions brought them into contact with new powerful people, or in some cases that the actions strengthened connections to powerful people with whom they previously had only marginal connections. In this chapter, I argue that taking these collective actions led to changes to the social system that strengthened the

participants' agency. Further, the experience of preparing for, carrying out, and reflecting on their participation in the actions led to increased skills, confidence, and sense of efficacy which also strengthened participants' agency.

7.1. The Two Actions

Three months after forming and beginning the organizing process with the SICs in each of the seven participating settlements, all the participants, including the NGO partners and me, had tentatively come to understand the systemic issues at work in the settlements. We had examined the social networks in detail and discussed them with the SIC members, so all parties were aware of the importance of the new connections that had been formed through this project. We understood that these new connections were strengthening the participants' ability to act in their interests, but this was tempered by constraints as well. Each settlement had their unique power landscape, in which the relationship between the residents and their *parshad* was the dominant feature. In some cases, SIC members and their fellow residents had to move carefully so that their empowerment did not provoke a backlash from their *parshad* or other powerful actors upon whom they relied for access to resources and stability.

This had to some degree been mitigated by strategically adopting a 'non-political' approach. While acknowledging their individual connections to political actors or parties, the SIC members portrayed their collective action as something separate. In some cases, as with Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar, they were able to suggest that 'non-political' action via the SICs could advance the cause of the party. However, there were limits to the effectiveness of this strategy, which were made visible during the actions.

The main purpose of the SCSVUP project was to strengthen the agency of people living in the informal settlements. While the NGO partners had originally assumed this could be accomplished by providing information to people living in the informal settlements and 'creating a buzz' around issues of urban poverty among NGO actors, things had developed so that the focus shifted to organizing and building relationships directly with people from the informal settlements. Thus it became a working assumption that the agency of the participants could be strengthened by shifting their mode of action – that is, by changing the narrative, by changing how they positioned themselves relative to the issues and stakeholders around urban poverty, how

they interacted with other powerful actors, and how they saw themselves as having an impact on processes of urban poverty and poverty eradication.

The Media Meet and City Consultation set out to attempt this shift. Firstly, the Media Meet attempted to change the narrative around ‘slum-dwellers’ and urban poverty. They publically told the story of their own ‘self-empowerment’, how they had formed their own ‘slum improvement committees’, and how they were well informed and well-prepared to assist the government in implementing the RAY policy which would upgrade their ‘slums’ into proper neighbourhoods, provide them with housing rights and stability, and ultimately have a positive overall impact on the city as a whole.

This also involved a shift in positioning. As described earlier, most of the SIC members had experience with the standard ‘political society’ repertoire of public action. They were comfortable protesting, mobilizing to pressure government leaders, and using the narrative of ‘the helpless and dependent poor’ to shame and pressure government to provide services. This time, the SIC members avoided positioning themselves as needy and helpless. They explained how the RAY policy required their participation in planning and carrying out upgrades, emphasizing that they were prepared to accept that responsibility. They did not criticize the government for the state of their settlement but offered a helping hand. The hope was that rather than shaming the government into action through pity and public outrage, they would encourage them into action by showing how far ahead citizens were and how much could be gained through partnerships given their overlapping self-interests.

This was a proposal to change the way they interacted with government and powerful actors in the city. While they were used to engaging with powerful actors via the patron-client dynamic (and while that dynamic was still important), the Media Meet and the City Consultation allowed the SIC members to perform a different role. They assumed the power to act as approximate equals with officials responsible for implementing RAY. They pointed out that this was, in fact, demanded by the wording of the RAY guidance itself, which requires local governments to work directly with local residents to plan, build, and manage ‘slum upgrades’. Further, they attempted to make this power equalization a reality by performing it in public.

7.1.1. The Media Meet

After a week of intensive preparation for facilitating the Media Meet, the SIC members were ready. However, on the day, the director of PRIA’s Raipur office took

the centre stage for himself. Rather than allowing the SIC members to introduce themselves and frame the event, he introduced them to the reporters who had assembled in the settlement. This kind of behaviour is not unusual, since people with higher rank or seniority are often expected to take the facilitator role during events. However, the SIC members had been prepared to do it for themselves, and they felt undermined by his actions.

For their part, the reporters were very reluctant to accept the SIC members' new narrative. While Keshav explained the process of forming the SICs and some of their initial organizing successes, reporters kept interrupting him to ask 'Don't you have any other issues?'

But Keshav kept bringing the narrative back to the one they had prepared. Once he answered the reporter by saying:

Whatever government schemes come up, we tell each other about it. Like there was a survey for the Rajiv Awas Yojana. There was no survey in his *basti*, so we informed them about the survey. We informed them that there was a survey in our *basti*, and a few houses were left out by the surveyors, so you must be careful about [when they come to do your survey]. During the survey in Lakshmi Nagar, they took steps to make sure the survey was done well. You'll hear more from Amrit... The people in Gandhi Nagar used this GPS machine. The government spends lakhs of rupees for GPS survey. They themselves made the survey of their *basti* and made this report. [Holds up the report] Like this, they made the report. And the Nagar Nigam hired agencies to survey in other slums, and here, the Gandhi Nagar people themselves did this. And then they met the commissioner and told him about how they did their survey with the GPS machine (Keshav, 23 April 2013, Media Meet).

In this way, the preparation paid off. The SIC members were able to overcome the inertia of the common narrative and were able to have their version of the story published in the Raipur newspapers. In this particular quote, Keshav can be seen linking the abilities of the SIC groups to carry out technical activities to the RAY policy requiring such participation from settlement residents. He pointed out how his SIC had held the officials accountable for doing the RAY survey properly, without overtly criticizing the government or complaining about their hardships.

Even though the director of PRIA's Raipur office undermined the SIC leadership in facilitating the event, and even though the reporters were set on telling a particular story ('helpless slum-dwellers live in appalling conditions, corrupt politicians not fulfilling their obligations'), the SIC members made sure that their story was told. Through insistence and repetition, their version of the story was ultimately printed in

the local newspapers. Further, they were able to perform the ‘empowered’ role they were seeking. They delicately handled the politics at play to simultaneously draw attention to injustices and policy failures, while not overtly criticizing the government or powerful actors upon whom they were dependent for access to services. They were able to portray their activism as non-political and non-threatening, while at the same time portraying themselves as powerful agents of change.

7.1.2. The City Consultation

In keeping with the attempt to shift the narrative and public performances of the SIC members, the City Consultation was used strategically to put the SIC members forward as public leaders capable of partnering with other stakeholders around the issues of urban poverty. While it is socially expected that ‘important’ people are shown deference and offered a prominent position on a stage or dais for public events, we considered arranging the chairs into a circle so that the SIC members would be physically placed as equals with the other stakeholders within the space of the meeting. However, the director of PRIA’s Raipur office completely opposed this idea, insisting on following usual practice and offering the ‘important’ attendees a place on a panel on stage.

The Mayor, The Councillor, and a number of other stakeholders attended the Consultation, including two of the three Zone Commissioners for the settlements in this project, the director of the State Level Technical Cell responsible for implementing RAY in Chhattisgarh, and a number of representatives from NGOs working on urban poverty issues. The agenda was set so that the SIC members would introduce themselves, put forward their questions and proposals, and then engage in a conversation with the other stakeholders. The Mayor and The Councillor would be given time for a lengthy response.

The event began as planned, with the SIC members presenting themselves as experienced leaders looking to partner with and hold accountable other stakeholders around the implementation of RAY. However, the Mayor arrived an hour into the ensuing discussion. She gave her prepared response without listening to anything said by the SIC members, and with her abrasive demeanour and provocative political language, she instigated a conflict with some of them. This resulted in some shouting, and several SIC members stormed out of the meeting. After the Mayor left, The Councillor arrived, clearly having been informed of the proceedings and timing his visit

to miss the Mayor. While the Mayor was a Congress Party member, The Councillor was a BJP member, and he understood that most of the SIC members were in his camp. He also spoke abrasively and condescendingly, but the crowd cheered him and accepted his platitudes about the immanent success of RAY. Amrita, Subhash, and I found this puzzling, and it took quite a bit of reflection with participants afterward to come to an understanding.

After The Councillor's departure, the Consultation finished, and we all struggled to make sense of what had just happened. Some positive developments came out of the Consultation, including closer cooperation between Raipur-based NGOs, many of whom were, without realizing it, simultaneously attempting to organize with community-based groups in informal settlements. However, the overall results of this action were mixed. The SIC members themselves had conflicting feelings about the outcome. One SIC member from Gandhi Nagar later reflected, saying 'We didn't like the Mayor. We felt like thrashing her face with a shoe!' (Gandhi Nagar SIC member, 15 May 2013, reflection discussion in Gandhi Nagar). Another SIC member, from Shanti Nagar, was eager to downplay the drama of the City Consultation and simply get on with their work, saying 'Everything is fine, but this RAY survey still remains pending' (Shakti Nagar SIC member, 15 May 2013, reflection discussion in Shakti Nagar).

In the aftermath of the City Consultation, I made sense of what happened through conversations with Amrita as well as many of the SIC members who were present. The lessons about the impact the event had are examined below, but here I conclude by saying that the behaviour of the Mayor, The Councillor, and the SIC members seemed to be surprising to everyone who attended.

7.2. Lessons – impacts of action on the system

The primary purpose of collective action is to create social change that strengthens agency for those taking the action. A secondary purpose is to provide experience and experiential learning to directly strengthen the participants' agency. So what impact did the two actions described here have for social change? Given what I have claimed about how change happens in a complex social system, how can we tell what has changed and assess what it means?

To consider the impact on the system, I consider the areas of the system I have highlighted so far: the structure of the system, including percolation dynamics to allow

greater access to resources; systemic relational dynamics among actors; and the role of mediators, including the *parshad* relationships that fell into one of the four attractor-state patterns.

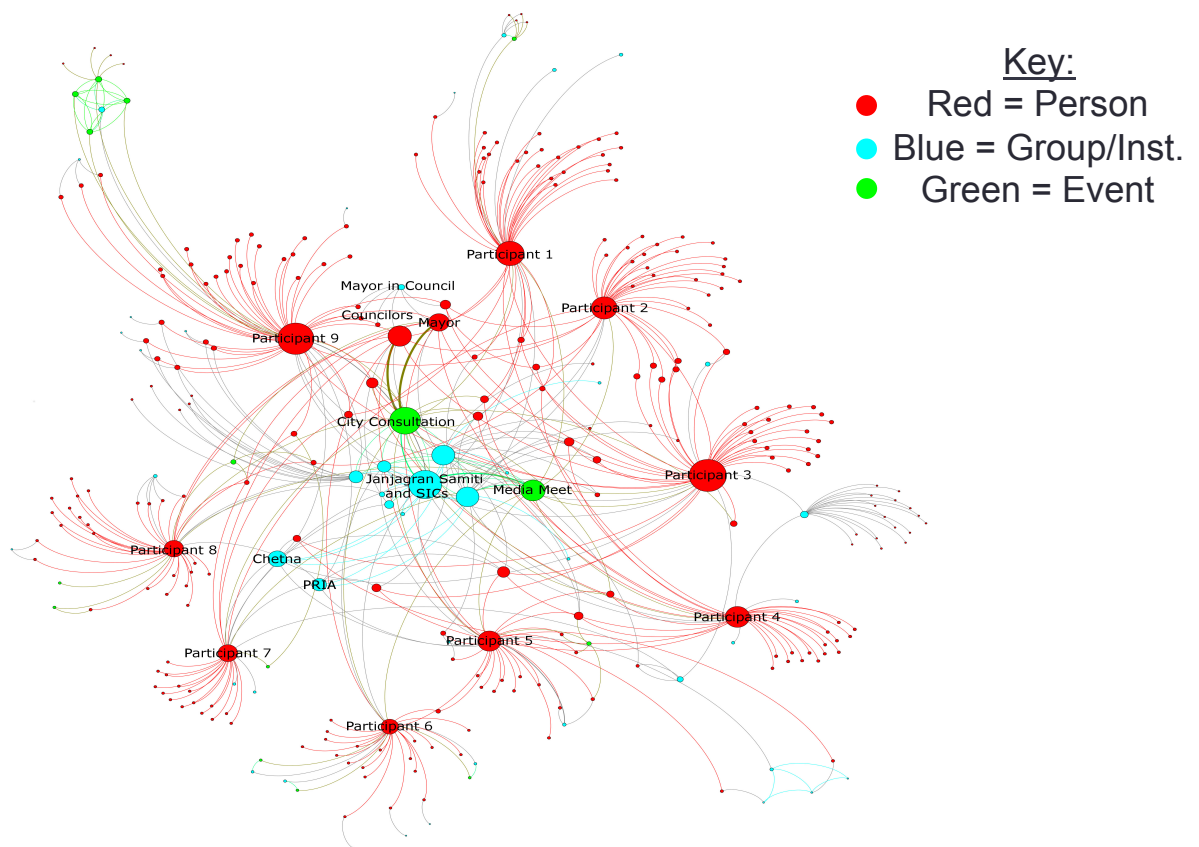
7.2.1. Impact of action on system structures

To what extent did these collective actions impact the structure of the system, i.e. the social networks of the actors? Earlier, I made the case that simply by forming the SIC groups, the participants significantly restructured their social networks to strengthen their agency. This was accomplished by linking the previously disparate groups to each other, creating a ‘giant component’ through which new resources could flow to SIC members, especially via the ‘fixers’ in the settlements that were already relatively powerful.

These two actions significantly contributed to that process as well. While the initial formation of the SICs allowed individuals to come into contact with each other across the different settlements, it was only by taking action together that the SIC groups solidified their status as an institution. Having the experience of standing together, telling their collective story to the media, and speaking as SIC members before powerful actors at the City Consultation strengthened the participants’ sense that their connections were becoming stable, and they would be able to rely on each other going forward. These actions took place after the social network survey, but the evidence from conversations and reflections after these events suggests that having these shared experiences contributed to strengthening new connections and creating greater redundancy in the network. This would have mitigated the fragility of the emergent SIC organization and strengthened its resilience.

This is reflected in figure 15, the combined social networks drawn out by several key participants near the end of the project. To be clear, even though figure 15 looks like a social network diagram similar to those in chapter 6, it is quite different. This network is the result of only nine interviews in which participants drew out their individual social networks on chart paper. The participants were asked to list people, events, and institutions to which they were connected, resulting in a multi-level network. Multi-level networks that include different types of nodes require specialized analytical approaches, which I do not apply in this case. Figure 15 may usefully be thought of as a graphic depiction of a combination of narratives, rather than a precise social network diagram.

Figure 15. Combined participant NetMaps



For example, Participant 9 is Aditya from Shakti Nagar. He was a local leader and leprosy advocate with connections to leprosy and public health organizations. In figure 15, we can see that he attended a set of events (green nodes in the upper left). These were leprosy and public health conferences through which he maintained contact with other leprosy advocates, some from as far away as Japan. Similarly, figure 15 shows that each of the nine interviewed participants brought their own unique set of contacts to the group. Participants 2 and 3 shared several mutual contacts, and participants 3 and 4 were members of the same SIC. Otherwise, there is little overlap in the connections that participants brought to the SIC organization. Meanwhile, it is clear that each of the SIC members interviewed reported that their connection to their settlement's SIC and the *Janjagran* Samiti were important. Through their mutual belonging to the new SIC organization (clustered in blue in the centre of the network), they could access each other's relational resources. Further, each reported that attending

the Media Meet and City Consultation had strengthened their connections to the Mayor and The Councillor.

The size of the nodes in figure 15 represents relative centrality, based on an estimated calculation of eigenvector centrality. It is clear from the figure that the institutions of the SIC groups themselves had become central in the participants' social networks. Further, it is clear that the two main events – the Media Meet and the City Consultation – themselves were important. It was through these events that the SIC groups and their members were able to initiate or renew relationships with key actors like reporters from Raipur's major newspapers, the Mayor, The Councillor, and others. This strongly indicates that, upon reflection about the two actions, the participants felt that the actions themselves were important instances of demonstrating and strengthening their collective agency.

In Amrita's assessment, the events had directly strengthened the SIC institutions and would have a lasting impact. She explained:

I only think that after all these interventions, now at least these SICs, no one will be able to cheat them, deceive them... I think they're getting empowered. Now they can deal with their issues at their own level. They have become so much capable. That's what I think. And the other thing is, in future, whenever these people will decide to do any big thing, they all will be together. That's what I think. Like if they want to do anything, if they want to do any protest or anything, these people will be always together. If any SIC member will get any problem, and he feels that no one can help him, then they can communicate with these powerful people who'll get them a solution (Amrita, 24 April 2013, reflection discussion).

The SIC members also reflected on the extent to which taking action through the SIC groups expanded their social networks and resulted in strengthened agency. Those who came into the project with many connections and strong agency reported little gain from increased connection, while those who came into the project with fewer connections reported that their experience had been transformative. Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar, one of the 'fixers', reported:

The main reason for my extensive relationships is my association with the party, and I was able to connect with others over time. For instance, I connected with some of these people through my work (Amrit, 27 June 2013, facilitated NetMap exercise).

When asked about her experience making new connections through the SIC actions, Lalita from Shiv Nagar 1 reported:

We have received a lot! ... Yes, now that we have met so many people, we are attending meetings and learning so much. This is a big thing for us (Lalita, 18 June 2013, facilitated NetMap exercise).

She also claimed that she experienced a huge difference in the way she interacted with people publically and that people would now approach her about public issues. She felt she had become more confident when it came to meeting with people and taking public action.

Dinesh from Ambedkar Nagar was a strong natural leader, but had little experience with public action before this project. He explained the impact the SIC action had on his own social network:

It has grown. In the form of personal connections, connections related to society, and connections to officials – there has definitely been some growth. There have been times that I have had to fight for it. For instance, in the pipeline case, I went to the contractor and said ‘I need this line. Where else will I bring the water from? Now, where the money will come from is your headache, not mine.’ Finally [the contractor] told me ‘We are your *karyakarta* (workers, activists), we are associated with you. Dinesh bhai, I have some fund in my quota, you tell me where and show me the site.’ I couldn’t tell a lot of people as there are limited funds, but we used this not for personal benefit but for the larger public (Dinesh, 17 June 2013, facilitated NetMap exercise).

Based on the nine facilitated netmap exercises and other reflection conversations, it was clear to me, as well as the NGO partners, that participating in the two actions created new relationships and strengthened existing relationships for the SIC participants. Some SIC members, like Amrit, claimed that taking part in these actions added little to their networks. Others, like Lalita, claimed that participation had been transformative. Evidence suggests that in all cases, participation had at least some impact in strengthening relational ties.

7.2.2. Impact of action on relational dynamics

To what extent did the actions impact the participants’ relational dynamics? One of the main systemic relational dynamics I explored earlier was the set of practices generally referred to as ‘political society’. As I described earlier, this dynamic was entangled with the role of the ‘fixers’. The ‘fixers’, namely Keshav from Ambedkar Nagar and Amrit from Lakshmi Nagar were crucial for helping their neighbours ‘get their work done’ via their own political connections. They were also leaders, though with contrasting styles of leadership, using the context of the SCSVUP project to intentionally strengthen the agency of their communities.

In this way, the actions were a testing ground and proving ground for their leadership. Keshav prepared intensively before the Media Meet, intentionally shifting his oration style away from the ‘political society’ style of demands and protest to an ‘organizing’ style of claiming agency and initiating partnerships. In this way, he was able to counter the embedded narrative that the reporters wanted to hear.

Further, in the City Consultation, the SIC members portrayed themselves as empowered and organized, willing to partner with other stakeholders to implement RAY and address issues of urban poverty in Raipur. However, relating to the Mayor and The Councillor proved to be quite challenging. What do those interactions and that political drama say about the impact of the City Consultation on systemic relational dynamics?

Firstly, the messiness of what happened shows how entrenched existing dynamics are. Not even PRIA and the other NGOs could really accept the change. In spite of attempting to intentionally frame the actions as non-political, the aggregate (mostly BJP) political ties of the participants constrained the ways they were able to interact with the politicians, especially the limits on their abilities to perform independence. Whether because they were ill prepared, or because they felt pressure to perform in a partisan way, the SIC members, including Keshav, were unable to avoid getting drawn into an antagonistic exchange with the Mayor. The Mayor’s off-putting tone and her negative comments toward BJP politicians, who many of the SIC members relied on as patrons, provoked a reaction.

Further, when The Councillor arrived, the crowd cheered him even as he spoke rudely and condescendingly to them. It seems likely that because he was saying things they were primed to hear, they were not offended by his tone. Whereas few of the participants were actively dependent on a Congress politician (and none directly dependent on the Mayor), the Councillor was the *parshad* for Shiv Nagar 2 and had significant influence on residents of Shiv Nagar 1 (including Devki *didi*, who likely stopped participating as an SIC member because of pressure from her BJP connections). A significant portion of the participants had strong incentives not to challenge The Councillor, since they were dependent on BJP connections and The Councillor was positioning himself to make a run at state-wide political office.

The events of the City Consultation revealed the difficulty in maintaining a new relational dynamic since the existing ‘political society’ dynamic is strongly entrenched. The actions of PRIA (privileging the politicians, setting up the SIC members as an

‘audience’), as well as those of the politicians (talking down to the SIC members with a sense of authority), constitute a systemic pushback that worked to undermine the effects of the change action.

One of the SIC members of Shakti Nagar argued that the events were having an impact on the way he and the other SIC member settlements interacted with the wider society. He explained:

Sir, our message has been made available to the entire public, thanks to the newspapers, that there is a working committee [the SICs], and even the railways and all have been made aware that some work is being done... Now what is happening is slowly people are becoming aware and they also want to get involved with the SIC so that they can also do something for their respective *bastis*. For instance, people in B----- Nagar want to get involved with something like this. A lot of people know my name and so discussions are taking place (Shakti Nagar SIC member, 15 May 2013).

During the Consultation, there was an exchange between some SIC members and the official in charge of the State Level Technical Cell, the agency responsible for overseeing the implementation of the RAY policy throughout the state of Chhattisgarh. Having visited the man multiple times in his office, I understood him to be rather out of touch with how things were being implemented on the ground. The SIC members explained that, contrary to the RAY guidelines, some of their settlements were not being surveyed or included in the RAY policy. They further explained the lengths to which they had gone in order to make this known to the authorities. The man simply could not accept that things were not going according to plan. Sitting in his office, he had assumed that things were working properly.

7.2.3. Impact of action on patterns of mediation

Finally, to what extent did the actions impact the mediation dynamics, especially between the SIC members and their *parshads*? Firstly, the SIC members understood early on, before PRIA and I did, that taking public action in this way was risky in terms of shifting the power landscape. Amrit explained the constraints he felt in terms of what he could say at the City Consultation:

RAY is about giving ownership of houses to the people who are already residing there. But if they say that in India surveying is continuing but where is the real work done? Then what will I say? Congress does surveys but in actuality it does nothing. This will become a topic of debate, if this topic arises... See, the other party people will not tolerate any words against them, so this will have an adverse effect on us (Amrit, 2 May, reflection discussion).

Even though the RAY policy was not meant to be political, and the SICs were intentionally non-political, he explained that he could not discuss it without appearing to criticize his own patrons or else appearing to criticize the Congress Party, which would tarnish the non-political character of the SICs.

Further, Subhash articulated the importance, as organizers, of using action to provoke a reaction:

Yeah, we want a reaction from the establishment. I mean, we need a reaction from the establishment. Basically, if we're not being somewhat provocative to the establishment, they won't pay attention and nothing will change... So you see, you cannot [really] do anything- you highlight that things have been handed down from above but after that nothing came of it for you. You have to very coolly to see the reaction of the establishment. You have to see whether they understand what you're doing to be anti-establishment. The reaction is very important, what they will say. Another thing is that the [visibility] should come, organizing the slums and getting a reaction. We have to be aware that the action can spark the thing. Now, the entire forest will be on fire... This is a spark. You have to understand that now our work has become a spark, right? (Subhash, 24 April 2013, reflection discussion).

To create social change as system change, it is important to find leverage points where a small action can provoke a larger systemic change. In this case, we understood that the purpose of organizing was to provoke a change in the way the residents of the informal settlements, and the SIC members in particular, interacted with the wider society. The extent to which they had built power, i.e. the extent to which they had achieved empowerment, would be measured by the extent to which the system responded to their power. This would be inherently risky and would need to be negotiated carefully by the participants.

It should be expected that rapid empowerment would be seen as threatening to the existing power brokers. This is what Amrit was warning. He explained that he had taken sufficient precautions to align the interests of his SIC with the interests of his patrons so that they would not try to crush him. However, he was then constrained to act in that direction only, at least until more power had been built to provide protection.

Notice that he was not referring to his *parshad*. Lakshmi Nagar maintained an 'independent' relationship with their *parshad*. This, as explained earlier, meant that the settlement had greater agency, but he as an individual was closely bound to his particular individual patrons. In this way, the actions had little immediate impact on the mediation dynamics for Amrit or his settlement.

In Gandhi Nagar, they maintained a relationship of dependency with this same *parshad*, Mr Singh. One of the issues in Gandhi Nagar that the SIC was trying to work on was getting a street lamp installed to illuminate the settlement at night. They had been repeatedly visiting Mr Singh for months about this. Before the City Consultation, the SIC members told me that when they went to visit Mr Singh, they presented themselves before him as needy constituents. After the City Consultation, they began presenting themselves as an organized SIC, the legitimate representative of the settlement residents, to negotiate with him.

Shifts within the state space of these *parshad* patronage relationships would likely involve either slowly improving as the SIC members gained power or rapidly collapsing if they came to be seen as a threat. In this case then, Gandhi Nagar seemed to have achieved a small measure of strengthened agency in relation to their *parshad*, perhaps nudging that dynamic toward the ‘independence’ configuration.

In terms of mediation by the ‘fixers’, the two actions seemed to weaken their power in favour of strengthened distributed leadership. Neither Amrit nor Keshav dominated the events. During the Media Meet, Keshav intentionally focused the attention of the reporters on the actions and achievements of the other SIC members, and they were able to speak for themselves. Amrit made only one brief, general statement during the City Consultation, allowing the other SIC members to gain experience of being in the spotlight as spokespersons for their settlements. In this way, distributed leadership was fostered among the SIC members through the two public actions.

Meanwhile, PRIA’s role as mediator remained ambiguous throughout the two actions. Amrita and I spent a great deal of time working with the participants to prepare for the actions. We tried to make clear that the project would end soon after the completion of the City Consultation, and at that point PRIA would cease being able to support the SIC organization. We hoped that we could help them reach a point of stability and resilience in the time we had to work together. But, even as Amrita and I helped the participants prepare to facilitate their own public actions, PRIA leadership undermined them in both events. The state manager insisted on facilitating the Media Meet, and he insisted on presenting the SIC members as an audience at the City Consultation rather than as discussants in an equal dialogue. This suggests that it can be challenging for NGO partners to avoid taking on some aspects of a patron-type relationship when engaging in these kinds of programme interventions.

7.3. Direct impacts of action on agency

In addition to creating social change, the actions were meant to strengthen the agency of the participants directly. Agency is simultaneously an individual and collective attribute. In order to act in one's individual self-interest, certain skills are required along with a sense of self-efficacy and appropriate conditions in which to act. Meanwhile, a collective also needs certain skills as well as a sense of collective efficacy and appropriate conditions in which to act. Organizing works by helping individuals find and foster areas of overlapping self-interest and devise ways of collectively acting in their collective interest.

These two actions were meant to address each of these points. Amrita, Nidhi, Subhash and I worked closely with the SIC members to develop and practice new skills – especially skills around articulating one's point of view. Some members, like Keshav, were quite experienced with public speaking, and they were able to train other less experienced members. At the same time, Keshav also explored new ways of acting in public – specifically using a less confrontational approach during the Media Meet.

During a reflection discussion in Shiv Nagar 2 after the Media Meet but before the City Consultation, Subhash encouraged Shomita, saying:

It is natural that if you talk and interact with the big people, then they will recognize you by face that he/she is from that particular *basti*. You will get a direct connection with them. Shomita, are you getting what I said? So it is important that you speak there... In this way relationships increase (Subash, 30 April 2013, reflection discussion).

Shomita said 'Yes, but we should have knowledge about what to say' (Shomita, 30 April 2013, reflection discussion).

Again, Subhash stressed the relational aspect of things saying:

Other than knowledge, relations also increase. We will decide a day when we will meet before the City Consultation. Shomita, you were present that day when we were conducting the training [for the Media Meet]. We will conduct that type of training. So your oration power will increase. But here time will be less, because the officers will not give us much time, they will not give us the whole day, they will leave in an hour. So we have to speak up more in less time. So we are arranging a training programme for this (Subhash, 30 April 2013, reflection discussion).

A field staff member from Chetna added:

When we conduct meetings, we keep an eye on who does well. You will not believe, have you seen the Ambedkar Nagar members? They speak and act very well. They even want that if some other *basti* people do not

have a link with the municipality, then they will try and connect them. They want that others should be frank like them and properly talk to the officers. They are trying to do so. We have made SICs in the 7 slums, but in future we want SICs to be made in all 282 slums. Firstly we have to end our hesitation and learn to speak frankly (Chetna staff, 30 April 2013, reflection discussion).

This discussion shows the growth in skills on the part of the SIC members. Just as Keshav from Ambedkar Nagar rose to the challenge to change the way he publically presented the issues of urban poverty, all of the SIC members were developing new skills, adapting their previous patterns of behaviour and adding a new type of performance to their repertoire. This was a departure from typical ‘political society’ behaviours such as protesting and making demands. There was something inherently generative in this performance – they were not simply making demands, they were proposing solutions, showing something they had built (without the support of the state or those officials responsible for providing services) and announcing that they planned to build much more. Here, these women from the Shiv Nagar 2 SIC, who had little experience with even the ‘political society’ repertoire, explained that they felt they had worked hard to develop skills to facilitate their own meeting. This demonstrates that these members had grown new skills, new self-awareness, and new confidence – all catalysed by the preparation, carrying out, and reflecting on the action.

Through this everyday practice of organizing – namely going to meet with the SIC members, reflecting with them on their experiences, and encouraging them in their growth – we were able to understand their growth and affirm their experiences and new feelings of confidence.

Later, in a discussion (during a group facilitated NetMap exercise) after the City Consultation, Amrita told the SIC members about the changes she had witnessed:

See, at first we were attached to them personally, but as we formed the SIC, then we got connected to more people, some are connected as organizations. As SIC was formed, we were connected with people as well as organizations like PRIA, then after city consultation, we interacted with big officers. For example, people didn’t know Aditya *bhaiya* before this. Maybe some of you knew, but the people of other *bastis* didn’t know him. So many things remained unfulfilled. As we got connected with Keshav *bhaiya*, many works [were] accomplished through him. So the main thing is how things have changed. So you have to feel this and move forward. Now if you come across any problem, like drainage or water supply under Nal Jal Bhagirathi Yojana (Water Policy), so now you know that you have to talk to which *bhaiya* in which case. For example in any case of health problems you can contact Aditya, or in case of Nal Jal Yojana you may contact Keshav of Ambedkar Nagar. You may also help other people. So

it yields contacts and sources being in the *samiti* [the SIC]. We met the Commissioner in case of GPS mapping, so confidence level increases that we can talk to him direct face to face. So we have to understand this thing. Until now we have moved with the help of PRIA, but now we have to move forward by ourselves. So PRIA will not conduct any meetings, you should conduct by yourselves and invite us [to] the meeting. It is not necessary to talk, but we want to see that we worked hard over two years to make you believe that you can do it [on] your own. So you can move by your own..... *Janjagran* Samiti has been made, so you have to register it. You by yourselves should do it. I can help you in this. So until and unless you do it by yourself, it will be a waste. We shouldn't let it die. This will be possible if the members are capable to do it by themselves (Amrita, 13 June 2013, facilitated NetMap exercise).

Aditya seconded Amrita's message, saying:

You [PRIA] are working for us, but in future, no one will support us. We have to move along by ourselves. People will be attracted toward you and help you through seeing your work. Sir [Subhash] also suggests to always be with the network. Let us suppose you say that [Gandhi Nagar's *parshad*] doesn't come here, or the Commissioner doesn't come here. But I have made such a network in 15 years that in one call they will be here. Here relationships matter. If you do not maintain proper relations they will not come to meet you (Aditya, 13 June 2013, facilitated NetMap exercise).

Amrita's comments at least reflect her thinking about how things had changed for the SIC members based on their participation in the SCSVUP project. She pointed out that for many of them, it was only once they were part of their SIC that they were able to build relationships with powerful actors outside their immediate social networks. Some SIC members, like Keshav and Aditya, had maintained their own networks over the years through which they drew power and accessed resources. However, by participating in the SICs, the other members were able to directly connect with people like me, Amrita, Subhash, the Mayor, the Commissioner, and probably most importantly, the well-connected SIC members from other informal settlements. In other words, participating in the project as an SIC member strengthened agency by simultaneously creating new relational conditions and fostering new ways of relating that made new actions possible.

Aditya also understood this dynamic instinctively. He explained that he had maintained his own connections to powerful people, including a Japanese NGO that dealt with leprosy, as well as many politicians and bureaucrats across India. He found the new connections to PRIA and Chetna valuable, but they were not transformative for him. However, he told the other members that the SIC networks were their chance to

build networks that can be transformative. He not only told them that ‘here relationships matter’, he shed light on the way they matter.

In order to have the power necessary to act or create changes, first strong relationships must be built. These relationships are the source of the power, and they must exist quite apart from whatever the issue of the day is. He was arguing that the new relationships formed through the project needed to persist, and that they are not just for this project. They were not just for RAY or any single issue. He argued that the relationships would be the foundation of their power going forward. By working together, they would strengthen the network and grow their abilities to act, both as individuals and as a collective.

All SIC members who attended the Media Meet and the City Consultation were given the space and time to speak. In both cases, we had many discussions and prepared to create a unified narrative between all seven settlements. The overarching concern for each settlement was attaining security and stability for their settlements through the RAY policy. Some settlements were successfully navigating the process, and others had been excluded, so when speaking they were able to offer unique points, but overall they reinforced each other’s demands to follow through with RAY. Even though the City Consultation involved a confusing element of drama, the two major actions that capped the SCSVUP project contributed to strengthening the agency of the participants. The drama served to highlight some of the constraints on agency that persisted, but by bringing those tensions to the surface, it also made it visible that the participants were pushing back against those constraints.

7.4. Conclusion

These two events were not the only actions that the SICs took collectively, but they were the main actions, and examining them in detail demonstrates the ways action was crucial for strengthening agency within the SCSVUP project. The actions strategically engaged in all the relevant systemic features of life in the informal settlements as experienced by the participants. It leveraged the newly formed SIC institution to continue strategically restructuring their social networks, thus strengthening the agency that comes from position within a network. They used the events to perform a new relational dynamic that was meant to prefigure the kind of ‘empowered’ dynamics they hoped to achieve. Through the actions, the SIC members

also attempted to shift – at a safe speed and with deliberate caution – the patronage dynamics that remained a dominant mode of interacting with society.

In each of these arenas, evidence has been presented that the SIC members succeeded in creating a significant change, thus strengthening their agency. However, one year is not enough to say with confidence what kind of changes would occur down the line or how sustainable the changes on display here would be. Given the entrenched nature of these dynamics, one should expect the system to ‘correct’ for the participants’ new agency and attempt to return to the ‘status quo’. This was expected and accounted for by the participants as they sought to move forward with their organizing efforts after the formal end of the SCSVUP project. Unfortunately, the long-term impact of these actions and the SCSVUP project is beyond the scope of this thesis.

In addition to the social change aspects of these actions, the actions also resulted in strengthened agency directly by improving the skills and experiences of the individual participants. The experiences of preparing for, carrying out, and reflecting on these actions improved the capabilities of the individual participants as well as their abilities to act collectively.

Even as the actions impacted agency, they were evidence that agency had already been strengthened. Engaging in these collective actions was an expression of agency, since before the SCSVUP project they would not have been possible. The possibilities for carrying out these actions emerged over the course of the project as new relationships were developed that created conditions for new ways of relating. As the new relationships and the new ways of relating co-evolved, the SIC organization itself emerged from the ‘giant component’ of the network. This organization was then able to carry out new collective actions such as the Media Meet and City Consultation, and carrying out these actions further strengthened the SIC organization. As redundancy increased with greater relational density, and relationships were strengthened through shared experience, the SIC organization became more resilient. By the end of my time contributing to the SCSVUP project, the SIC organization was poised to get registered as an official organization and expand into other settlements. They were hosting their own meetings and carrying out detailed planning discussions about how to continue building the SIC organization into a city-wide ‘slum-dwellers’ movement.

Chapter 8 - Conclusions

8.1. Introduction

8.1.1. Research Question

My primary research question for this thesis, as stated in chapter 2, was ‘How can the agency of people living in informal settlements be strengthened through efforts to build new relationships and new relational dynamics?’ In order to answer this question, I followed a set of four inquiry streams that traced agency through its complex systemic context to learn how systemic factors worked to constrain agency or open possibilities for strengthening it.

I have made the case that the urban social systems in which people live are complex – they are made up of many elements acting in parallel that relate to, and are impacted by, each other such that they adapt and co-evolve in unpredictable ways. In spite of the unpredictability, urban social systems, like complex systems generally, tend to display relatively stable, emergent patterns rather than chaos. There are serious methodological challenges to incorporating this complexity into an analysis. Approaches that have been attempted previously ranged in their treatment of complexity from purely metaphorical, such as that of Samir Rihani (2002), to purely mathematical, such as those of Michael Batty (2013) and Geoff West and Louis Bettencourt (Bettencourt et al., 2010, 2008, 2007).

My four inquiry streams made use of tailored sets of mixed methods to investigate four main systemic factors. I explored how people living in informal settlements related to each other and to the wider society in order to capture system dynamics. I explored the social networks of people living in informal settlements to capture system structures and how they changed over the course of the SCSVUP project. I explored mediation – mediation by *parshad*-patrons, local ‘fixers’, and the NGO partners to capture how agency is affected by multi-level dynamic-structures. Finally, I explored collective action – how capacities for collective action changed over the course of the SCSVUP project and how that reflected changes in the systemic context, which contributed to strengthening agency.

8.1.2. Methodology

To address my research question, it was necessary to make use of a range of methods in order to explore the different domains of a complex social system. I followed in the path set by the STEPS Centre's constructivist approach to complexity (Scoones et al., 2007). This approach recognizes that real-world systems are an ontological reality but that in order to learn about them and relate to them, different actors bring their unique perspectives on the system to bear, resulting in 'soft' systems of constructed meaning. This led me to conclude that the most robust way to learn about agency in the context of a complex social system would be to engage with and incorporate the perspectives of multiple actors from different positions within the system.

Additionally, I approached learning about complex systems with the 'generative' approach advocated by researchers such as Joshua Epstein (2007) from the Santa Fe tradition and Fararo and Butts (1999) from the computational sociology tradition. This approach holds that in order to explain certain features of complex systems, it is important to focus on the nature of agents, their structural relationships, and their interaction dynamics.

With these approaches, I grounded my research in the action research paradigm in order to construct my research in collaboration with participants from within the system. This paradigm guided my processes of building relationships with those participants, and through those relationships I was also able to find a place within the system. The positionality afforded by these relationships in turn framed and facilitated my ability to employ Systemic Action Research (SAR) and Social Network Analysis (SNA) methodologies. Within the SAR methodology, I incorporated a range of qualitative and participatory data collection methods and analytical methods. Within the SNA methodology, I collected social network data and employed standard mathematical analytical techniques alongside more participatory analysis that helped make the collection and analysis of social network data accessible and meaningful to the participants.

8.1.3. Conceptual Approach: Four inquiry streams

The issue of agency appealed to me as a research focus because agency is a fundamental feature of humanity, the source of what Hannah Arendt (1998) called natality: that property of being human that makes one capable of creating something new out of nothing. This is, in my understanding, what is represented in the ancient Hindu image of the Natraj (see figure 16, Hara Design, 2009), where Lord Shiva creates the universe with a dance, bringing forth possibilities by embodying them in his movements, holding in tension the forces of creation and destruction, impermanence and eternity, ignorance and wisdom, and the material and the divine (Jansen, 1993).

Figure 16. Natraj

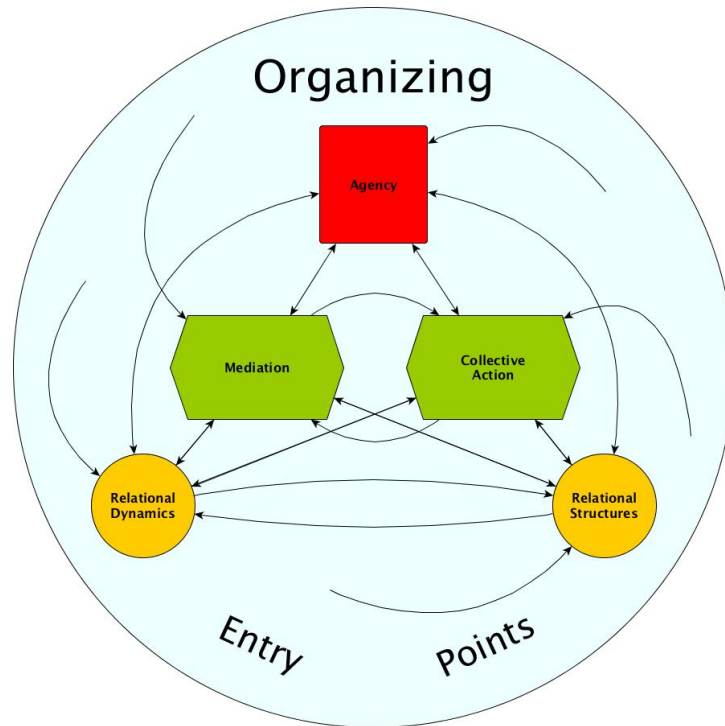


I grounded my understanding of agency in the sociological tradition, building on work by Emirbayer and Mische (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) to disentangle agency from a conceptually overdetermined relationship with structure. This allowed me to consider agency in its own right, as something that emerges within the functioning of a complex social system that involves structure but also system dynamics.

Guided by an understanding of agency as something that emerges from the functioning of complex social systems, the generative approach led me to explore the roles of system structures and system dynamics. Tracing agency through structures and dynamics led me to see mediation and collective action as particular structure-dynamics that required their own treatment. As my research design took shape, I chose to follow inquiry streams to investigate each of these four systemic factors.

Combining these different areas of focus, I arrived at a tentative model of agency, represented in figure 17. In this model, agency is explained by 1) the functioning of relational dynamics, 2) collective and individual positionality within a social network, 3) the nature of and effectiveness of mediating relationships, and 4) the capacities to act collectively. In this model, each of these four factors impacts agency directly, but they also impact each other, thus impacting agency indirectly as well. Figure 17 updates figure 1 in the addition of organizing. Organizing is the intentional strengthening of agency by building relational power. In practice, this means working in partnership with participants to find and exploit entry points throughout the system.

Figure 17. Agency model with organizing as the practice of finding entry points for system change



With regard to system dynamics, I drew on literature around political society (Chatterjee, 2012, 2004) to make legible certain behavioural patterns common amongst people living in informal settlements. By considering how such behavioural patterns are reflective of existing levels of agency and how they can constrain agency, I explored how to nurture strengthened agency by fostering new ways of relating.

Regarding system structures, I drew on literature about social networks amongst people living in informal settlements. I noted how the literature suggests that people living in informal settlements tend to maintain close, dense ties within the settlement but weak ties to other sectors of society (de Wit and Berner, 2009; Jha et al., 2007), resulting in what Ronald Burt (2007) calls network 'holes', leading to brokered patronage-type relationships. I also noted that, once informal settlements are recognized as type of complex system, the complex networks literature offers general insights that can be usefully applied. In particular, I draw on the notion of percolation (Saberri, 2015; Solomon et al., 2000) in complex networks to explain non-linear system change.

Patronage dynamics are well known to play an important role in social life in the South Asian context (Chandra, 2004; Mohanty, 2014). Given what is known about the centrality of mediated relationships (brokers, patrons, 'fixers', etc.) for life in Indian informal settlements (James, 2011; Piliavsky, 2014b), I found it necessary to consider

mediation as an emergent dynamic-structure hybrid worthy of examination in its own right. I considered the complex ways in which city-level elected representatives, *parhads*, mediated between residents of settlements and the state, how local ‘fixers’ functioned (Berenschot, 2014) and how their presence interacted with the mediation by *parshads*, and how NGO partners come to function as mediators during programmatic interventions (Mohanty, 2014).

Finally, I considered collective action to be an indicator of as well as a pathway toward civic agency. I drew on collective action literature (Cleaver, 2007; Desai and Joshi, 2014) to explore the relationship between the capacities for collective action and agency. Over the course of my research, I came to see the importance of organizing practice to strengthening agency because of its focus on intentionally increasing capacities for collective action.

8.1.4. General Conclusions

In this thesis, I present a model of the agency of people living in informal settlements. I suggest that agency depends on 1) the existence of effective relational dynamics amongst the residents; 2) the nature of mediating relationships, including patrons, ‘fixers’ and NGO partners; 3) the nature of relational structures (social networks); and 4) the capacities for collective action. Based on this model, I suggest that an effective organizing practice that seeks entry points to address each of these four systemic factors can be co-created within partnerships between settlement residents and NGO partners based on genuine, long-term relationships. I offer some of my research experiences as a potential pathway to such an organizing practice.

8.2. Empirical Contributions

8.2.1. Relational dynamics and agency

I recognized early in my research that ‘political society’ behaviours were an important pattern of political engagement. The political society repertoire is a vernacular for expressing popular politics, and as such, it must not be seen as a totalizing explanation of politics, but a starting point for political engagement. Political society describes how popular politics is done in India in places like Raipur. To recognize these patterns is not to take a normative position on their desirability or to assume that they will naturally lead to transformation or liberation. Rather, recognizing

political society as a set of relational dynamics that can be observed as a repeating pattern across urban informal settlements in India provides a starting point from which we can begin to explore how agency can be strengthened.

In chapter 4, I presented a set of vignettes that introduced participants from each of the seven participating settlements and their respective social and political environments. In each of the settlements, I observed residents displaying the ‘political society’ behavioural repertoire. While the same relational patterns were observed across the settlements, the existence of the ‘political society’ repertoire was not correlated with levels of civic agency. For example, in Shanti Nagar, residents were aware of the need to protest against eviction and their dependence on their *parshad* for resources, but they were not able to effectively work together. They were not able to keep the lake in the centre of their settlement clean, even though everyone used it as a resource (see section 4.1.2.). In Ambedkar Nagar, on the other hand, residents had greater civic agency, and they regularly obtained services through putting pressure on authorities and politicians. The existence of a political society repertoire is not enough to explain these differences in agency. There must be something beyond these patterns that impacts whether political society behaviours are able to create change.

In chapter 4, I made the case that the SCSVUP project brought the participants together in a unique relational context in which new relational dynamics were possible. This arose from forming relationships across settlements as well as between residents and the NGO partners. Residents from a settlement with low civic agency such as Shanti Nagar found themselves now in a relationship with other residents from more powerful settlements, like Lakshmi Nagar. Then, rather than struggling to work a ‘vote bank’ dynamic or to protest in order to access services, residents were able to access services through Amrit and his connections within the BJP and the Labour Welfare Board. They were able to learn from Keshav from Ambedkar Nagar and his way of interacting with politicians and political parties. Like Keshav preparing for the Media Meet, they were able to conceive of and adopt new ways of interacting with powerful actors. In the new relational context, people were able to respond to different incentive structures. Shaping these incentive structures, then, seems to be a key way of extending the political society repertoire to strengthen agency. My research suggests that it is the existence of effective relationships (i.e. relationships that can alter incentive structures) that can facilitate more effective action and help ensure that action taken can have the desired effects.

Political society attempts to explain how (popular) politics works in places such as the seven participating settlements in the SCSVUP project. While the work of Chatterjee (2012, 2004) and others who have followed in his footsteps (Gudavarthy and Vijay, 2012; Routray, 2014) does make the description of relational patterns of people living in settlements legible and understandable, it does not explain variation in agency outcomes. Responding to recent research that has applied the political society concept to empirical analysis, Chatterjee offers encouragement, saying ‘empirical cases ... are enormously enlightening in the way in which they put my conceptual distinctions to work. The usefulness of conceptual distinctions ... lies in their ability to clarify a confusing empirical jumble’ (2012, p. 318). He goes on to argue that cases in Kerala (Devika and Rajasree, 2012) and Kolkata (Harrison, 2012) in which ‘NGOs born within the spaces of civil society can effectively give voice to the demands of hitherto unrepresented groups and even force political parties to take notice’ (2012, p. 320) do represent the blurring of the boundary between civil society and political society. For Chatterjee, however, this blurred boundary is made visible by the concept of political society as distinct from civil society. This validates the concept rather than undermines it.

This research contributes to extending the political society concept into empirical analysis at that very boundary between civil society and political society. Chatterjee developed the concept to make sense of the ‘empirical jumble’ surrounding the ways in which people on the margins of Indian society engage in politics. Much work has been done to articulate this unique form of political engagement. But what now? In this thesis, I have addressed a gap in the analytical literature around how, given the persistence of the political society behavioural patterns, to move towards greater agency.

Certain skills and experiences central to political society are helpful in civic life: the ability to mobilise a protest; the ability to act collectively, if only as a vote bank; the ability to remain attuned to a power landscape and to devise mechanisms for responding quickly when situations change; the ability to *jugaad* social and material arrangements. We need not valorise informality or illegality in order to value these things (Gudavarthy and Vijay, 2012). There is, further, no reason to assume that these skills will ever be enough to overturn an unjust system (Sarkar, 2012). My research suggests that, in taking an organizing approach to working with people living in informal settlements, the political society repertoire can be a good starting point for extending agency. New

connections with NGO partners and between people living in different settlements can create the conditions for those skills and experiences to be applied in new ways according to a new set of systemic incentives. For example, rather than needing to mobilise a protest against a settlement clearance, residents may work with NGO partners and media connections to demonstrate a high-profile collaboration with government to properly implement a policy that upgrades the settlement and prevents eviction. Knowledge of law and policy are important, but so are the relational practices – many of which happen in informality – of getting things done.

8.2.2. Mediation and agency

Building on the findings from chapter 4 regarding the role of relational dynamics in strengthening agency, chapter 5 presented evidence on the role of mediation. I suggested that there are four relational configurations that are common between settlement residents and their elected representatives - their *parshads*. The main determinants of the configuration (which I suggest can usefully be seen as attractors in the relational state space) were whether the *parshad* maintained a high or low level of involvement in the affairs of the settlement and the degree to which the *parshad* was supportive or antagonistic in his dealings with the settlement residents. While the *parshad* patronage relationship appeared to be collectively brokered and negotiated by the settlement residents, the independence configuration seemed to be correlated with the existence of local ‘fixers’ that maintained individually brokered patronage relationships with one or more powerful actors besides the *parshad*. Further, after building partnerships with the residents of the seven settlements and working with them to form SICs, PRIA and Chetna also came to be mediators impacting agency.

This research suggests that, depending on the particular attractor state in which a settlement finds itself, different interventions may be more effective. Based on the limited interactions I had with the dominating *parshad* of Hari Bhumi Ward, risk of suppression (potentially with violence) is quite high in the domination configuration. It is not clear how to escape the systematic undermining of change action. When shifting from the neglect configuration, it could be possible to shift into dependence by organizing a method of effective ‘vote banking’ or into independence by establishing strong alternative pathways for accessing resources. When attempting to shift out of dependence, it may be difficult to form new alternative pathways for accessing resources without threatening the existing give-and-take dynamic with the *parshad*.

Finally, in the independence configuration, agency may continue to be strengthened by strengthening alternative patronage connections. As Keshav suggested (see section 5.2), it may be possible to strengthen agency by flattening the patronage hierarchy – putting more people directly into relationships with more patrons to avoid the bottleneck of brokers.

Each of these configurations functions as an attractor in that particular structures and dynamics are at work that tend to undermine the effects of change action. The heavy-handed suppression typical of the domination configuration that literally removes change agents from the area is the most clear form of undermining change. In the neglect configuration, the lack of effective patronage relationships tends to be correlated with low levels of agency, limiting residents' capacities to form new patronage relationships and keeping them in a state of low agency. In the dependence configuration, the mutual dependence between residents and their *parshad* keeps both interested in avoiding alternative connections. Finally, the independence configuration is predicated on high levels of agency and multiple patronage relationships – both of which facilitate the further expansion of relationships and the further strengthening of collective capacities. The only way to determine the best course of action to strengthen agency is to get a sense of how the settlement is embedded in its systemic context, how the relational dynamics and relational structures fit together and what their capacities for collective action are. Then, agency can be strengthened by iteratively following the chosen path and learning from experience as you go along.

Beyond this, my empirical treatment of mediation contributes to an understanding of agency and how agency can be strengthened by complicating the established notion of the 'fixer'. Rather than simply being local elites that capture benefits, 'fixers' are important agents that play an important role in mediating agency within the social system. By investigating *parshad*-mediated and 'fixer'-mediated relationships, my research provides more detailed insight into the 'normal' functioning of political society. For example, Chatterjee (2012, 2004), de Wit and Berner (2009), Manor (2000), and Berenschot (2014, 2011) all discuss the kind of actor that may be called a local 'fixer'. In the literature, however, it is nearly impossible to reconcile their varying narratives. Interestingly, they all miss the crucial fact that local 'fixers' are residents of the informal settlements as well. They are not outsiders, even as they broker connections between their neighbours and powerful outside actors. The importance of

this cannot be overstated. A local fixer may be powerful, but he must still live as a neighbour with others. He may have higher status, but he cannot act with impunity.

Once we open the black box of the local ‘fixer’, we can see that they are not all the same. Subject to the same systemic incentives, individuals adopt their own approach to the role, often with a sense of civic purpose. Even Amrit, the most visibly self-interested fixer in the project, saw himself as genuinely benefiting his community. Nor can this be seriously questioned. He may not have been eager to bring his neighbours with him to meetings or develop their civic capacities, but he actively built new relationships with people (even those outside his immediate neighbourhood) and actively helped them with their problems by channelling party resources to them. Whatever benefit he got from this work would have been the same in any case, but he was strategic about how he did it in order to ‘empower’ the people in his network. He frankly told me that many people he gave sewing machines to would have immediately sold them and drunk the money away. But the SIC members he helped in the other settlements actually got some benefit from the things he was able to provide.

In this light, the local ‘fixer’ becomes more of a 3-dimensional character. We can be realistic about the kinds of incentives they face, including the fact that their work demands the perpetuation of inequalities. At the same time, we can recognize them as leaders with genuine desires to help diminish those inequalities over time by using their advantageous position to create public good for their settlements. By including thick description of two local ‘fixers’, this thesis helps address the need for greater in-depth study of these important mediators (Berenschot, 2011).

An important point of synthesis here is that the alternative pathways of accessing resources that I observed in the independent settlements consisted of ‘fixer’ relationships. Since I came to the *parshad* patronage model inductively, I cannot assert that these ‘fixers’ caused the independence of their settlements, but this seems quite plausible and might serve as a testable assumption for future research. It is a clear pattern, however, that the two independent settlements had strong ‘fixer’ leaders with connections to powerful people in the BJP. Devki *didi* also played a kind of ‘fixer’ role in her settlement, maintaining a strong working relationship with The Councillor (also a BJP politician), but her settlement was not independent vis-à-vis its *parshad*. They were quite well organized and effective at using their joint action to strategically navigate their political relationships. Aditya from Shakti Nagar was also a kind of ‘fixer’, but only because of his connection to powerful NGOs working on leprosy and public health

issues. Like Devki *didi*, his alternative pathways of accessing resources were also not associated with political independence from the *parshad*.

The formation of the SIC groups in each of the seven settlements and relationships between them and the NGO partners changed the mediation processes for the participants. In certain ways, the SIC members instinctively approached the NGOs as political society-style patrons. For example, SIC members repeatedly asked PRIA for identity cards claiming that the SICs belonged to PRIA officially. This made no sense to Amrita or PRIA leadership, since such documentation would have no formal standing. However, for the SIC members, this would have meant a significant boost to their relational credibility and potentially helped ‘lubricate’ their organizing efforts. Meanwhile, PRIA and Chetna changed their way of thinking about their roles as ‘bridging’ civil society actors facilitating dialogue between service providers and recipients. It was not as straightforward as expected to bridge the divide, and it required PRIA and Chetna to engage more deeply in organizing relationships with the SIC members. This organizing practice that developed offers a direction forward for strengthening agency.

Agency in urban India is mediated by patronage-type relationships of one form or another. The ‘fixer’ relationships and the *parshad* relationships are part of the same system in which the residents of the settlements live. This implies that any intervention that seeks to strengthen agency should seek to critically engage the multiple ways of relating, both amongst settlement residents as well as between residents and their various patrons. It does not seem realistic to expect to escape patronage or mediation altogether. Pragmatically considering how to navigate those various relationships can make pressure points evident at which interventions may start to unlock agency.

8.2.3. Relational structures and agency

In chapter 6, I demonstrated how network centrality can serve to indicate social power for actors, and that seeing one’s social networks can help inform efforts to strengthen agency by making leverage points visible as well as making changes visible that have occurred in response to actions. I also argued for the importance of making the technical analysis accessible to participants so that they may use the insights to make more effective decisions. The impacts of making new connections are not linear. In fact, by considering the multiple settlements that participated in the project as part of a larger system, we could see a ‘phase change’ happen over the course of the project. I made the

case that forming new connections did not just increase individuals' access to resources on a one-to-one basis. At some point over the course of the project, the relational structures of the participants changed from being a set of largely disconnected clusters to being one largely connected cluster – a 'giant component'.

Insights from complex networks science shows that the formation of such a 'giant component' has major implications for the kinds of dynamics that are possible on a network (Saber, 2015; Solomon et al., 2000). Not only does a 'giant component' make it possible for resources to more freely circulate through the network, it makes it easier for information and even social norms to spread. Drawing on insights from social psychology and neuroscience about collective action (Blackwood and Louis, 2012; Martínez et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 2012), we can assert that the existence of such a 'giant cluster' even makes possible new forms of identity formation and acculturation processes that amplify the transformative effects of collective action. Not only does it make collective action more likely, but it makes it more likely that collective action will be transformative – for the participants as individuals, even if not clearly improving the material conditions in the settlements.

The focus on agency, then, allows us to keep the focus on aspects of empowerment, transformation, and social change that participants aspire to. Whereas a poverty alleviation framework might argue that the SCSVUP project was a failure because it did not radically improve the material conditions of the participants, the participants themselves reported that it was transformative – especially for those who had little experience with public action before this project. Furthermore, while several social network analysts have explored the role of percolation in social systems using abstract models (Newman and Watts, 1999; Saber, 2015; Tur et al., 2014), the concept has, to my knowledge, not been used in the analysis of actual social network data collected off-line²¹.

The contributions from this aspect of my research are as much methodological as empirical. Conducting a relatively straightforward social network analysis of the relational structures the respondents provided allowed me (and them) to quantify their

²¹ Lymeropoulos and Lekakos (2013) suggest comparing online social networks to complex systems models but do not explicitly analyse such networks using SNA techniques while Ji et al. (2015) analyse percolation effects in Facebook networks to propose a method for assessing influence. Neither consider offline network data, nor do they consider how interventions impact network dynamics.

positionalities. This did not necessarily surprise those who were already leaders before this project, but it did provide an important affirmation to those for whom this was their first time experiencing public action. This was especially true for the ways I was able to demonstrate that social networks had changed since forming the SIC groups.

Researchers thinking about the implications of complexity for development have suggested that better outcomes can be achieved through networking (Gilchrist, 2001, 2000). This research verifies that insight but also complicates it. The changes in the network over the course of the SCSVUP project show how and why networking worked. By forging relationships between settlements that had previously been separated, individuals within the settlements grew closer to each other, and a new organizational entity emerged that exhibited a new kind of collective agency and new capacities for collective action. Looking at the evolution of this network reveals strengthened agency for individuals as they came to access resources through new connections to powerful actors. Settlements as collectives also strengthened their agency as they became capable of carrying out new forms of public action.

Pairing this analysis with the challenges of navigating mediated relationships (from chapter 5) suggests that simply forming new relationships does not necessarily strengthen agency. In some cases, for instance, when a settlement is in a dependent relational configuration with their *parshad*, the addition of ad hoc connections could undermine existing functional patronage relationships. Further, the network after formation of SIC groups remained fragile. Analysis revealed that the new organization that had emerged was not yet resilient – it was at risk of fracture if the new relationships between members from different settlements broke down. Additionally, Krackhardt's metrics for organizational hierarchy revealed that this new organization was relatively flat, with Keshav and Amrit occupying central but relatively weak leadership positions. This indicated that distributed leadership would be necessary to hold the organization together – i.e. those members with relatively little experience with public action would need to step up as leaders within the nascent organization.

In addition to the empirical findings, I also innovated an approach to making technical analysis of social network data useful and meaningful to the participants. While some researchers (for example, Schiffer and Hauck, 2010; Schiffer and Waale, 2008) have used participatory social network mapping techniques to inform action, most social network researchers would estimate the networks based on statistical assumptions (Hipp et al., 2012). Fewer still have constructed the data in such a way as

to interrogate both the dynamics of and the dynamics on the networks over time. And to my knowledge, none have done all this while making the analysis and the findings accessible to the participants for their on-going planning and organizing activities.

8.2.4. Collective action and agency

Chapter 7 explored the impact on agency of two major events that the SCSVUP participants co-hosted with PRIA and Chetna. It also explored the impact of the project's organizing practice, which itself drew on the Indian Alliance style of organizing. One of the major points made in the literature is that the success of the Indian Alliance has been built on the enduring partnership between SPARC, NSDF, and Mahila Milan (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013, pp. 137–9). However, this project differed from the Indian Alliance model of organizing practice in that the SCSVUP project was time-bound and a long-term partnership between the NGO partners and the new settlement-based associations was not part of the plan. What chapter 7 showed, though, was that organizing practice does have an impact on project outcomes even in this time-constrained context.

My research findings suggest that it was not the partnership with an NGO per se that helped strengthen agency. It was the building of genuine relationships across difference – for example across different settlements, across political allegiances, across class divides, etc. There were times in the project when PRIA staff acted in opposition to genuine relationship – for example, when they insisted on chairing the Media Meet even though the SIC members had prepared to facilitate it on their own and when they insisted on showing deference to the politicians who came to the City Consultation by offering them a pulpit from which to speak to the participants rather than with them (chapter 7). However, what participants reported to be more important was the constant daily communication, the effort we put in to spend time with them, listen to them, and walk with them on their journey. This started with the days we spent walking through Gandhi Nagar with the GPS tracker as the SIC members enumerated their own settlement and presented their documentation to the Commissioner in their attempt to be included in the RAY policy to the time we waded through flood waters together on our ways home after a Janjagran Samiti meeting during the monsoon.

Exploring the Media Meet and the City Consultation revealed several important pathways to strengthened agency. Firstly, the practice of preparing for action, taking action, and learning from action strengthened skills and confidence amongst the

participants. Shomita from Shiv Nagar 2 had no experience with public action prior to the SCSVUP project. As reported in chapter 7, after the Media Meet, she reflected on how speaking in public was something new and difficult for her. She was able to tell her story and advocate for her interests in both actions. At the same time, even Keshav, who had years of experience with activism, was able to expand his repertoire through telling a new story of co-production and cooperation at the Media Meet.

Secondly, the fact that these actions took place and were co-facilitated by PRIA and the SIC groups already indicates strengthened agency. These actions were fundamentally different from the kinds of political society activism the residents of the settlements had typically engaged in previously. These actions were simultaneously an expression of strengthened agency (by doing something that was previously impossible) and a pathway to strengthened agency (by showing a pathway to future, more effective actions). By the end of my research, the SIC groups were meeting independently and planning their own independent actions to further their agenda. They were planning to formally register as an organization and to expand with SIC groups in other settlements.

Finally, these actions also impacted agency by bringing the participants into contact with new people. For example, at the City Consultation, the SIC members interacted with other NGO leaders apart from PRIA and Chetna that were also working in settlements across the city. They were able to interact with the Mayor and the Councillor not as individual constituents, but as organized citizens belonging to a collective. However, as I argued in chapter 7, these interactions also revealed the continuing constraints on agency. These interactions were not constructed to be between equal parties, as the Mayor and the Councillor were both shown formal deference and given a platform to speak to the SIC members rather than with them. Tensions erupted during the Mayor's speech suggesting that some SIC members with ties to the BJP (as opposed to the Mayor's Congress Party) felt the need to perform allegiance to the BJP through contention with Congress Party members. Amrit explained that in such public events, he and the SIC members needed to tread lightly so as not to upset the delicate power landscapes in which they maintained patronage relationships with various politicians and organizations.

This exploration of how preparing for, carrying out, and reflecting on collective action can impact agency builds on the work of scholars like Biekart and Fowler (2012), who have theorised a framework for civic driven change, by experimenting with action to create change. Building on social psychological studies that suggest generally how

participation in collective action can have transformative effects for both individuals and groups, my thesis contributes an exploration of this process in the development context, enhancing understanding about the linkages between action and agency in social change processes. I conclude that strengthening agency in social change processes requires great attention to the details of this action-agency interaction: the organizing practice.

8.3. Tying it all together - Organizing: strengthening agency and creating social change

In the story of this multi-year action research project, a shift in perspective on the part of PRIA and Chetna is evident. In the beginning, they articulated a vision of themselves as members of ‘civil society’ that should help people living in poverty by mediating between them and government or service providers. But the project became primarily about organizing with the participants. This meant a new, explicitly relational kind of action for the NGO partners. It meant a new kind of mediation.

Organizing is the intentional building and strengthening of relationships for strengthened agency. It involves intentionally building relationships and then intentionally taking action. The intentionality thus requires planning and reflection. It requires specific kinds of communication, coordination, experimentation, and edification. It requires establishing norms and building trust.

SPARC and the Indian Alliance (which includes the National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan), provide a canonical example of NGO-informal settlement joint organizing. Literature on their history and achievements suggests that a grassroots-driven social movement to resist settlement clearances (NSDF) eventually united with a group of female pavement-dwellers (Mahila Milan) and an NGO partner (SPARC) to devise new ways of promoting the interests of people living in urban poverty, vulnerability, and informal settlements (Mitlin and Patel, 2014; Patel and Mitlin, 2004).

However, the literature on these organizations rarely goes into detail about the specific experiences of particular people in organizing, becoming an Indian Alliance affiliate, building skills and capacities for action, and finding success in the Indian Alliance style of organizing for ‘co-production of services’. This research offers a detailed look at the early development of an Indian Alliance-style arrangement that

sheds light on some of the processes of building a partnership and some of the challenges.

The SCSVUP project was, at the top institutional levels, a collaboration between SPARC and PRIA. PRIA ran projects in Raipur, Patna, and Jaipur, with little interaction between the three cities' project teams. I did not interact with SPARC at all during my time contributing to the project in Raipur, nor was I aware of any substantial interactions between PRIA staff and SPARC staff. The team in Raipur of which I was a part had to find its own way to effectively organize. This thesis provides a look at the process of bringing the PRIA and Indian Alliance approaches to organizing together. This was essentially spelled out in the SCSVUP project document (PRIA, 2011, p. 7), when it states, 'This intervention will identify and orient civil society active in the city to the opportunities that RAY offers. Then, organization and mobilization of the urban poor and local community-based organizations would be enabled around the process of mapping and enumerating the slums and squatter communities.' My findings may help in understanding the relational process of organizing communities for these and other such groups as they seek pathways to strengthened agency.

Through the set of three public meetings in each settlement, Amrita, Nidhi, and I got to know the people living in the settlements. Communities selected members who would act as leaders, and we spent time with them to get to know them further as these leaders coalesced into the SIC organization. This nascent organization was made visible in Chapter 6 through the emergent 'giant component' in the social network across the seven settlements. Chapter 7 showed that nascent organization taking two actions and learning from those experiences to inform their plan for the future. By the end of the project, the Janjagran Samiti, the central steering committee for the SIC groups, was meeting independently, establishing their own rules and norms, and making arrangements to apply for formal recognition as a civic organization.

In Raipur, the obvious first step was to form local associations – what became the SICs. This in itself proved to be challenging. Even as commonplace as self-help groups and local associations are in India, we faced vehement opposition in Hari Bhumi Ward from a *parshad* that saw any NGO intervention as a threat. This makes clear, that empowerment is about altering the power landscape. This process of forming SICs also made clear that in many ways, the settlement residents were more prepared for effective organizing than the NGO partners. In chapter 4, I provided a set of depictions of

relational dynamics at play in the participating settlements. Several important dynamics emerged, which bear restating.

Levels of individual and collective agency within and between settlements varied quite a lot, but in all cases, residents tended to behave according to relational patterns consistent with the ‘political society’ repertoire (Chatterjee, 2004; Corbridge et al., 2012; Routray, 2014). Life in informal settlements seems to demand that residents adopt some form of collective identity and take collective action with their neighbours. Typically, people adopt a provisional identity as ‘slum-dwellers’ or ‘the poor’ which provides a platform for making claims to legal exception and morally grounded appeals for access to services. Typically, they also take collective action as a ‘vote bank’ for political patrons. In Shiv Nagar 1 (see section 4.1.4, box 4) this was exceptionally complicated and involved clandestine meetings to decide election winners and the performance of political divisions within the settlement so that different groups could earn money by working for all the competing parties and the settlement could collectively hedge against uncertainty by maintaining ties to all potential winners. This necessity for taking collective action also facilitates skills for public action that can serve as entry points for organizing. For example, Amrit and Keshav were prepared to be leaders in the SIC organization, even as they also strengthened their agency through participating in the SCSVUP project.

One of the first entry points around relational dynamics was found by the members of the Ambedkar Nagar SIC when they began convening meetings with the other SICs to discuss how to work together (see section 3.2.2.). They used their experiences to teach and advise the less experienced members from other settlements in how to take action. PRIA and I also worked with the SIC groups in several ways to develop new skills. One example was using a GPS device to self-enumerate a settlement according to the requirements of the RAY (also discussed in chapter 3 (section 3.1.3.1), box 3 of chapter 4, and mentioned by Keshav in chapter 7). Another example was the preparation meetings for the Media Meet and the City Consultation in which we worked with the SIC members to develop a less confrontational way of communicating with the media and with authorities to attempt to shift relations from contention over service provision to more of a co-production of services approach (see chapter 7).

As I described in chapter 7, this involved facing pushback. At the Media Meet, the reporters were initially very resistant to hearing anything other than their preconceived narratives of contentious ‘slum-dwellers’ and their poor living conditions.

At the City Consultation, the SIC members were constrained in how much they could discuss the implementation of the RAY policy because of the need to manage patronage relationships with the BJP party. They could neither be seen advocating for a Congress Party-led Central Government policy with Rajiv Gandhi's name in the title nor criticizing the local BJP politicians for failing to successfully implement policies.

Provoking pushback can be risky. As I describe in chapter 5, the dependence relational configuration between settlement residents and their *parshad* is particularly sensitive since it requires both parties to remain attuned to changes in the power landscape. Action that can be viewed as a serious threat to their mutual dependence can provoke a response leading to the breakdown of access mediated by the *parshad*. At the same time, provoking pushback can be an important indicator that an action is having an impact.

Taking a bird's eye view, we can see that the new relational structures discussed in chapter 6 created a nascent organization. This created the relational conditions in which preparing for, carrying out, and reflecting on the two major actions became pathways to changing relational dynamics. The Media Meet and City Consultation further revealed the entrenched relational constraints on agency stemming from the important mediating relationship discussed in chapter 5. Keshav and Amrit were charismatic leaders, and building new connections with them helped to strengthen the agency of the less experienced SIC members. However, much of their power came from their individual patronage connections to the BJP. Even though their particular settlements maintained independent relational configurations with their *parshads*, they were constrained by their individual dependence on patrons such as the Councillor to the point where they could not lead the SIC members in challenging him at the City Consultation.

In this way, the everyday organizing practice developed within the SCSVUP project involved finding these entry points in the system for changing how the system worked. For example, the entry point of forming SIC groups in the seven settlements changed the system structures, which created possibilities for new relational dynamics, which created possibilities for new kinds of action, which allowed some relationship dynamics to be renegotiated (such as with the media) while revealing others to be robust (such as the dependence on individual BJP patrons).

Figure 17 suggests that system change can be created through an organizing practice that finds entry points with impacts rippling throughout the system. Given the

complexity of the system, the impacts of change actions are likely to be impossible to fully predict. There is no equation with agency as a dependent variable or a clearly defined ‘right hand side’ with independent drivers of change. In order to understand how things are changing, it is necessary to bring together multiple ways of knowing and multiple perspectives. It is necessary to be attuned to changes through relational practice, and to collectively engage with data collection and analysis. This is how research can be incorporated into the work of organizing, or conversely, how organizing can be incorporated into the work of research.

8.3.1. Reflections on the three organizing approaches

Given their experiences living in ‘political society’, the SIC members were primed for taking (sometimes confrontational) collective action while remaining attuned to the power landscape. This is a crucial condition for organizing work. Empowerment or strengthened agency does not happen automatically through spontaneous ‘self-organization’. It requires honing skills for public action and using them to navigate and renegotiate the relational conditions responsible for disempowerment to begin with. Amrita and Nidhi, on the other hand, approached the work assuming that the project’s ‘civil society’ and ‘education’ framings would keep the work power-neutral. It was only after the shock of pushback in Hari Bhumi Ward that they began deliberately becoming attuned to the power landscape – through regular communication with the *parshads* and the SIC members (see section 5.3.). Initially, it seemed that Amrita and Nidhi assumed SIC formation would happen spontaneously. Later, they reflected on the amount of relational work that had gone into forming the SICs, and lamented that they would not be able to ensure their continued existence after the project finished (see section 7.2.).

I have argued in the previous section (8.2) that, given the systemic context of agency, strengthening agency requires an effective organizing practice in order to find entry points for intervention at the four key system locations: relational dynamics; relational structures; and the two dynamic-structure hybrids, mediation and collective action. Here I examine this finding in light of the particular approaches to organizing we brought into the SCSVUP project.

In section 2.7.3., I outlined the Indian Alliance approach and PRIA’s approach to organizing. Roughly summarizing, the Indian Alliance approach involves organizing communities into associations through collective work (such as enumerations, finding sanitation solutions, and resisting eviction) which become part of larger federations.

SPARC assists in facilitating exchanges amongst federation members and in mediating between the federations and government. Literature coming from SPARC (see section 2.7.3.) emphasises that the professional staff of SPARC see their managing of relationships at this level to be an important source of the Alliance's relational power. This is the level at which SPARC sees itself as organizing. SPARC also emphasises the need for local organizing within the communities which make up the Federation, but they leave it to the communities (rather than SPARC staff) to do the organizing work. This is likely a strength, since NGOs are not likely to be well placed for understanding and remaining attuned to the local power landscape. However, this results in literature that seems to suggest community organizing happens spontaneously. PRIA, on the other hand, tends to emphasise the educational nature of their projects (as participatory research). Their literature acknowledges that participatory research has a relational dimension, but this is left under-theorised (see section 2.7.3.). This, again, seems to suggest that the organizing work required to form associations happens spontaneously, with the result that PRIA staff may be unprepared for the relational demands of projects.

This research suggests that both SPARC and PRIA would do well to be more explicit about how community organizing happens within their projects and who takes responsibility for doing the organizing. If, as in the Alliance approach, organizing is left to the community, how can NGO partners help create conditions for more effective organizing? My research suggests that if NGO staff do not see themselves (at least in part) as organizers, even effective organizing from within the community will be illegible to them. For example, PRIA leadership failed to understand the behaviours of Keshav and Amrit during the City Consultation. For their part, Keshav and Amrit tried to explain their actions as navigating and negotiating a dependent but contentious relationship with powerful city actors, but PRIA leadership failed to understand. This was discussed in detail in chapter 7.

Lessons for finding entry points to systemic change

In section 2.7.2., I outlined some influential strands of organizing thinking and practice from the US context. The traditional Alinsky approach insists that organizers are paid outside professionals rather than members of communities; that they identify and nurture local leaders but do not take on leadership responsibilities themselves; that they search for areas of overlapping self-interest around which broad coalitions can be built, with the coalition members often being existing institutions (i.e. churches or

community-based organizations) rather than individual members of a community; and that they pursue change by initiating confrontational action by the coalition to provoke a reaction from the establishment. This approach has been critiqued around each of these foundational principles.

Organizing so conceived is likely to lead to organizer dependency, with indigenous community leadership unlikely to be adequately nurtured and organizers inevitably taking on leadership responsibilities themselves. Feminist and consensus organizing traditions have attempted to address this by seeing local community leaders as organizers, insisting that important relational power-building can and should happen in private intra-community spaces.

Self-interest so defined is rather static. Since it is the foundation for a coalition, evolving self-interests would undermine that foundation over time. Alternative approaches to organizing have seen self-interest as something that can be shaped through relationship building and consciousness-raising. In consensus-style organizing, coalitions are built around a consensus view of issues, with no particular organizers being responsible for reaching consensus. Instead, leadership, and thus the organizing work of building relational power, is distributed and shared through rotating ‘facilitation’ responsibilities.

The contentious action-reaction approach to creating change has been critiqued for viewing power as zero-sum. Stall and Stoecker (1998), in articulating a feminist approach to organizing, argue that the Alinsky approach sees advancement for the community through taking power away from the establishment. According to them, not only does the Alinsky approach further alienate members of the community (i.e. women and minorities) experiencing inequalities and discrimination within communities as well as the wider society, it also fails to account for the creative, emergent possibilities of power-in-relationship.

Through the SCSVUP project, we drew on the Alinsky approach (taking account of critiques and alternatives) as well as the Indian Alliance and PRIA approaches to organizing, tailoring them to fit our specific context (Bradshaw et al., 1994; Rothman, 1996). In doing so, I drew some lessons for how organizing can identify entry points for creating systemic change. I present these here, in reference to the elements of the system depicted in figure 17.

In terms of finding entry points to changing relational structures, the key is to be able to see the system. According to the traditional Alinsky approach, the relational

landscape is discovered by the organizer through a practice of one-to-one meetings, and as the base of shared self-interest takes shape, key figures of an opposition are identified. For the Indian Alliance, relational structures are illuminated as local communities link up with the Federation and begin learning from each other about how to ‘self-organize’ and come up with solutions to their own problems. One of the key mechanisms for seeing the relational landscape is the self-enumeration practice, in which communities collect data on themselves that can help to make them visible, especially to policy-makers.

In this research, we made use of social network data to make relationships visible. First social network data was captured by survey. Later, one-to-one NetMap exercises were conducted that helped individual members understand the impacts of their involvement in the project. These allowed the SIC members to see where new relationships were still needed. It also allowed them to see how their actions were reshaping relational structures. These tools helped strengthen the effectiveness of the preparation-action-learning cycle common to the Alliance, PRIA, and the Alinsky traditions (Chambers and Cowan, 2006, chap. 5; Patel and Mitlin, 2001, p. 11; Tandon, 2002d).

In terms of finding entry points around relational dynamics, my research suggests that organizing practice should be designed for helping the participants become attuned to each other and the power landscape. A traditional Alinsky approach would focus on organizer-centred facilitation of processes for surfacing shared self-interest. The professional organizer would bear the primary responsibility for implementing practices amongst coalition members based on what was seen as best practice within the organizing organization (i.e. different for the IAF, PICO, or ACORN). The Indian Alliance approach would focus on their various ritual practices – self-enumeration, savings, sanitation, housing upgrading. Local communities learn how to do these things from other members of the Federation, and in so doing, they become integrated into the Federation and strengthen links with SPARC.

In this research, I observed PRIA and Chetna staff changing their approach to engaging with the SIC members as they came to understand them better. They began with a more traditional SPARC approach, meaning that organizing was left to the communities. They did not see themselves as organizers. Later, they adopted some organizing responsibilities – regular meetings and communication with SIC members, co-ordinating and co-facilitating actions, and working with SIC members to build up

local leadership to reach sustainability by the end of the project. Typically, Indian Alliance members seek to avoid time- and resource-bounded projects. They argue that some problems cannot be ‘solved’, and that relationships, once initiated, may persist as long as all parties find them useful, evolving over time as the context merits (Patel, 1996, p. 6). Given that the SCSVUP project was bounded, PRIA and Chetna staff attempted to balance an organizing approach with the project limitations. PRIA staff stressed to the SIC members that there would be no institutional support after the project ended, but that the relationship should persist. Amrita exhorted them in one of the final meetings (see section 7.3. for the full quote): ‘So PRIA will not conduct any meetings, you should conduct by yourselves and invite us [to] the meeting. It is not necessary to talk, but we want to see that we worked hard over two years to make you believe that you can do it [on] your own.’

Time- and resource-constrained projects are not ideal for a relational approach to creating systemic change. However, in the ‘world as it is’, resources that can help strengthen agency often come with such constraints. The organizing approach PRIA, Chetna and I experimented with in this research did succeed in important ways. We did not leave the relational work exclusively to the communities, though it took too long before the NGO partners took on that responsibility. By sharing the organizing work with the SIC members, a common failing of the Alinsky approach – creating organizer dependency – was mitigated. Local leaders like Keshav and Amrit were seen, not only as leaders, but as organizers. This meant they were not simply seen as point people for an NGO-driven process. They were seen as co-creators of a new institution who would eventually be completely responsible for its sustainability. In that shared organizing, we did make use of some Indian Alliance ritual practices – namely self-enumerating and engagement with participatory housing policy. However, the day-to-day relating between PRIA and Chetna staff, myself, and the SIC members was more important for strengthening relational dynamics than the big actions.

Traditional Alinsky-style organizing sees the organizer as mediator between community members or organizations. As the organized community confronts the opposition, the role of the organizer as mediator is often opaque, the goal being a community acting on its own rather than under the direction of an outside force. In the Indian Alliance tradition, NSDF mediates between local associations and facilitates their direct interactions while SPARC mediates between the Federation members and the state or formal civil society.

In this research, I have articulated a nuanced view of mediation as a systemic structure-dynamic hybrid. In this way, individual SIC members, the NGO partners, and even members of political parties can be seen as mediating processes of change. The organizing practice experimented with in this research helped participants identify particular configurations of mediation, and, by paying close attention to the presence and content of relationships, helped identify ways to pursue systemic change. For example, without the relational practice in place between the NGO partners and the SIC members, it might have been impossible to discern whether particular *parshad* relationships were helpful or harmful.

Traditional Alinsky-style organizing sees collective action as about coordinated efforts by the coalition, once relationships have been formed, to provoke a reaction from the establishment. The Indian Alliance approach sees collective action in terms of the local Federation members' local action. Whether self-enumerating, creating a savings account, finding a sanitation solution, or resisting eviction, these actions are typically framed as happening in the local community, driven by the local community in partnership with the wider Federation.

In this research, we drew on both of these approaches. The organizing practice experimented with in this research helped build relationship bonds within communities, across communities, and between the communities and the NGO partners. Collective action involved forming the SICs, which emerged as a nascent organization. It also involved the two major joint actions – the Media Meet and the City Consultation – carried out to provoke responses from the establishment. Typical of both the Alinsky and Indian Alliance approaches, these actions were seen as being possible only because of the established relationships between the participants, with the daily relational work being seen as the source of real power.

The organizing practice that Amrita, Nidhi, and I followed through the SCSVUP project blended the federated, community-driven approach of the Alliance with the staff-as-organizer approach drawing on my Minnesota variant of Alinsky-style organizing. Subhash and I worked as organizers within each of the settlements. We did this alongside the SIC members, some of whom were already functioning as organizers, and others with whom we tried to nurture leadership capacities. As I discussed in chapter 7, many of the SIC members who came to the project with little public experience grew as leaders. At the same time, some did not. As I discussed in chapter 4 and 7, participants from some SIC members (namely from Shanti Nagar and Shakti

Nagar, which were weaker to begin with) did not successfully grow as leaders. This indicates that this relational approach to strengthening agency requires a minimum level of agency to be effective. In chapter 5, I pointed out that the neglect configuration is correlated with such low levels of agency. I made the point there that this configuration functions as an attractor – the low levels of agency and resources prevents interventions from being effective, keeping things trapped in that configuration. An organizing intervention with greater material and social resources might have been able to break the cycle, but devoting that level of time and resources to settlements with low probability of having significant impact is not likely in NGO-led, donor-funded, time-constrained projects like the SCSVUP project. That being said, I did demonstrate in chapter 6 that even these settlements benefited from their participation. Perhaps changes that were taking place at the level of the 7-settlement collective would have changed the relational structures and dynamics within those settlements, opening up further possibilities for them to grow as organizers.

Perhaps the main lesson from my research for organizing practice of any variety is to intentionally see local level organizing as impacting the system beyond the local level. My technique for capturing participants' social networks as they evolved over the course of the project is one way of doing this. The social network diagrams in chapter 6 allowed the participants to see how their organizing work had changed the relational structures and relational dynamics within and between their settlements.

8.3.2. Participatory research, organizing, and academic research

PRIA's approach to participatory research is not necessarily in tension with organizing, but it merits careful exploration. In my descriptions of the different approaches to organizing, it is clear that each is distinct, but that they share common roots. Myles Horton, the central figure behind the Highlander Folk School in eastern Tennessee knew and collaborated with Alinsky. Tandon, who founded PRIA, new and collaborated with Myles Horton. The SCLC organizers within the Black Freedom Movement in the USA built their organizing practice on principles articulated by Gandhi in South Africa and India (Chabot, 2000), who drew on organizing practice in his home state of Gujarat (Spodek, 1971). Horton and Tandon both drew inspiration from the Freirian approach to popular education, which was again central to organizing strategies of SCLC organizers across the segregated US south (Cotton, 2012).

Horton reflected (in conversation with Freire) on the relationship between organizing and education: ‘Saul Alinsky and I went on a circuit... debating and discussing the difference between organizing and education... Saul says that organizing educates. I said that education makes possible organization, but there’s a different interest, different emphasis’ (Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 115). Later, he added, ‘So when I went to organize for a union, I got a leave of absence from the Highlander staff... because I don't think organizing and education are the same thing. I do think participatory research and education are the same thing, but I don't think organizing and education are the same’ (Horton and Freire, 1990, pp. 119–20).

Tandon has argued that participatory research is the central effort of PRIA, which (in agreement with Horton) is closely related to the Freirian approach to education discussed here. Tandon and PRIA emphasise the participatory research aspect of what they do, but projects often require organizing, which has led to an organizing approach that underemphasises the importance of relational practice and relational power. As Horton says, participatory research and organizing are not the same.

Further, participatory research and academic research are not the same. I have already outlined the genealogies of participatory action research (see section 3.1.2.), noting that some strands emerge from academic origins and proceed into communities while others emerge from communities with an aim to overthrow the established expert knowledge of academia. But the main difference between organizing and participatory research is in the ambivalence amongst organizers about the role of knowledge in creating social change. Organizers build and strengthen relationships, assuming that effective relationships entail the power to make social change. One must learn how to build and strengthen relationships by trying to do so, but organizing generally does not attempt to codify that knowledge to serve as a product or resource for others.

I argue in this thesis that participatory research should include an element of learning how to build and strengthen relationships and that academic research can play a role in documenting those insights. In the SCSVUP project, we saw that the project would fail to have a lasting impact on the participants’ agency without greater focus and organizational effort devoted to building and strengthening relationships with and amongst the SIC members.

My research suggests that, as SPARC and its partners have made use of sanitation, savings, self-enumeration, and housing rights as focal points for projects with communities through which they become organized, the RAY participatory

housing scheme may also be used to build an organizing effort around. Like participatory self-enumeration before, collecting data about social networks and collectively analysing them can be an activity that brings participants together and helps to strengthen agency.

My research speaks back to the traditions from which I have drawn in two ways. First, it says to NGOs working with communities to strengthen agency that a focus on relational structures and relational dynamics can help link local-level change efforts to change at a more systemic level. The methodological approaches presented in this thesis may also help to do this – especially participatory analysis of social networks. A greater, more deliberate emphasis on organizing (the relational practice of building and strengthening relationships) can also help.

Secondly, my research suggests to those Alinsky-style, PRIA-style, and Indian Alliance-style organizing traditions that, while education and organizing are different, change efforts would be better for holding both in tension. Participatory research projects (like the SCSVUP) must not gloss over the relational work needed to make a formal project transformative for participants. At the same time, organizing projects (especially of the kind advocated by the IAF and ACORN) would do well to more deliberately document the impacts of the relational work on changing relational dynamics and relational structures within and between communities. An emphasis on organizing suggests that the real work of social change is in the monotonous everyday dealings with people that are the foundation for relational power. It is hard to see the real-time impacts of such work, or even the impacts after a year or two. My research suggests that such incremental change can be captured, it can serve as an affirmation for organizers and participants, and it can be codified as academic research as well.

8.4. Conceptual Contributions

In chapter 2, I grounded the empirical investigations of this thesis in the concept of agency, which I argued was fundamentally complex, necessitating an analysis capable of accounting for complexity. I argued that agency is the capacity to take action to make a difference, and is thus related to the concept of power, which can facilitate or constrain action. Drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of power as a systemic phenomenon, I argued that agency should be understood in terms of what is possible

within a power landscape. In this section, I revisit these concepts in light of my empirical findings.

8.4.1. Agency

Agency is the capacity to take action to make a difference. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) called attention to the problem within sociological theory of assuming the capacities of people to act are completely constrained or determined by existing social reality (i.e. structures). Classical social theory has had a difficult time on this front. For example, in chapter 2, I mentioned that social capital theories (Coleman, 2000; Narayan and Pritchett, 2000) attempted to address a shortcoming in the dominant rational actor paradigm in which people are assumed to consistently maximise their utility. Making this assumption obscures the ways actions and even aspirations are constrained by existing social arrangements. Social capital allowed a conceptualisation of interests and resources that extended beyond the individual.

The concept of agency helps avoid a binary view of action in which what people do is completely constrained by circumstances or completely free. What is possible is constrained by what exists, and what exists may be changed based on human creativity and ingenuity. To advance thinking on agency, I have called attention to the fact that human agency exists in the context of complex social systems. What people are able to do (as well as what they aspire to or see to be possible) co-evolves with social reality.

In this thesis, I have continually returned to relational dynamics and relational structures as the fundamentals of social systems. Emirbayer and Mische claimed that, because even within a single individual, agency involves multiple competing and interacting elements, agency is a complex phenomenon (1998, p. 964). In grounding an analysis of agency in the relational dynamics and relational structures of the system, I have pointed out a specific way in which agency is complex.

The individual does not act alone. The individual is already constituted as an individual within a network of others. Agency – both individual and collective – is about the individual-in-relationship, not just in relation to others with whom they have a direct connection, but as an element of an entire system.

My generative approach to capturing complexity allows a generative analysis of agency: agency is what emerges from the creativity and natality of individuals conditioned by and mutually reconstituting their connections to each other and higher-order structures of society. I am not convinced that agency, so defined, is worth

attempting to measure in absolute terms, but this generative approach helps in seeing agency strengthened or diminished.

An individual may learn a new thing, opening new aspirations or possibilities. A group of people may change the way they treat each other, reducing violence or making possible collective action. People may encounter each other, in the context of public work, and come to adopt a new identity, leading to new collective aspirations. This generative approach, in continually bringing the focus back to the systemic fundamentals, makes visible the interplay and co-evolution of structure and agency. In this way, by extending Emirbayer and Mische's effort to disentangle structure and agency, this thesis points the way to a potential for reintegrating them - not as two forces in tension, but as two, mutually constituting elements of social reality that co-evolve.

8.4.2. Power

This thesis has primarily been about agency, but, as I argued in chapter 2, the concept of power is closely related. In development studies, thinking about power has matured over the years from rather simplistic approaches that considered power to be held by individuals and wielded as a weapon (i.e. Dahl, 1957) to more sophisticated, '3 dimensional' approaches that widened the scope to consider social forms of power (Lukes, 1974) – especially the 'third' face of power which constrains how individuals are able to conceive of their own self-interests. However, even in these more sophisticated models, the object of power analysis remains individuals (and their one-to-one interactions). Gaventa (2003) and other power thinkers (i.e. Digeser, 1992; Philp, 1983) have noticed this and woven in elements of Foucauldian power theory, in which power is more diffuse, ever-present, and operates within a social field rather than being held by an individual.

Foucauldian thinking about power demands systemic thinking. To make sense of a kind of power that operates at the level of a field of force relations, it is crucial to have a concept of a relational system in which multiple interactions are capable of happening simultaneously. It is not simply that power exists within one-to-one interactions, or even that one-to-one interactions are conditioned by power that is latent in the social space. It is that one-to-one interactions (or even potential interactions) take place within a system of interactions that are already occurring, through which a social system emerges that has constraints built into its fundamental nature.

This has important implications for action. For example, a conceptualisation of social struggle based on a classic theory of power would see a struggle for advancement to be a contest between people with little power and people with greater power. The oppressed attain liberation by attaining the skills and capacities to take on the oppressors. Much of the American Alinsky-style organizing tradition would see it this way (Alinsky, 1971).

A systemic view of power, which grounds the analysis of this PhD, would suggest that oppression can be a result of systemic power relations rather than the direct result of actions taken by a class of oppressors. In the case of this study's participants, thinking about power in a systemic way allowed the SIC members to avoid direct confrontation with the more powerful. Those more powerful actors – including government entities, elected representatives, and political party leaders – functioned as important patrons and mediators for the participants. Simplistically seeing them as the enemy and mobilising against them would have been extremely counterproductive. Instead, through organizing, they were able to strengthen their agency while (to some extent, as a result of) engaging with those patrons and mediators in new ways, restructuring their own relationships, and renegotiating the terms of their continuing patronage relationships. Those relationships continued to be unequal (and probably oppressive), but the participants changed the power landscape and strengthened their agency in any case.

Foucault's conceptualisation of power helped to illuminate these kinds of social phenomena, but there have not been many empirical approaches capable of depicting systemic power dynamics. This thesis offers some steps in this direction. For example, looking at the social networks of the participants, it becomes possible to see how what happens in any particular relationship is impacted by what is happening in each of the other relationships across the entire network. For example, this thesis calls attention to the way mediation emerges through relational structures and relational dynamics. Seeing emergent structures of mediation – by elected representatives, local fixers, and even NGOs – helps in identifying potential ways of altering that power landscape by intervening at the fundamental systemic level: the relational structures and relational dynamics.

Further, the power landscape itself is a useful concept. I have argued that power is a field of force relations. These force relations are felt through people's actual relationships. I made the observation that participants coming from political society had

already developed techniques for being attuned to this power landscape through their continual interactions with patrons and powerful actors. Through everyday interactions (which happen to be rather rare outside of political society) they could feel whether certain things were possible or impossible, safe or risky, likely to open possibilities or provoke a retaliation. This is a very practical way of dealing with power as a systemic and relational phenomenon. NGOs and academic researchers would benefit from their example of how to become attuned to a power landscape. This, however, is only possible through an engaged relational practice. The kinds of organizing practice discussed in this thesis are capable of doing this while building and strengthening relationships to strengthen agency.

8.4.3. Complexity

This thesis attempts to forge a pathway towards a more empirical approach to capturing complexity in social change research. I have drawn on the highly quantitative, computational approach of the Santa Fe Institute (Epstein, 2007; Miller and Page, 2007); the highly metaphorical approach of systems thinkers (Burns, 2015, 2007; Byrne, 1998); and the constructivist, dialogical approach of the STEPS Centre (Scoones et al., 2007) in deriving my own ‘generative’ approach to treating complexity. My approach involves a focus on relational dynamics and relational structures as the fundamental features of complex social systems.

I do not make use of computational agent-based models like the SFI approach. However, I do make use of social network models – built on empirical data collected from and with participants – to depict the participants’ social system as it evolved over the course of the project. Through this depiction, along with analysis drawing from complex networks theories, I draw conclusions about the power landscape. I use changes in network centrality metrics (Butts, 2015; Wasserman and Faust, 2007) as evidence of changes in individual agency. I use changes in connectedness and hierarchy (Krackhardt et al., 1994) at the network level as evidence of changes in collective agency.

This generative approach to capturing complexity does not only rely on the depiction of ‘hard systems’ through networks. It affords a synthesis of this kind of understanding of the system with more metaphorical and constructed understandings of system dynamics. I employ a metaphorical understanding of complex systems as an analytical heuristic to explain why, for example, settlements seem to be trapped within

one of four patronage configurations. Each of these configurations functions as an attractor, in which existing relational structures and dynamics reinforce each other and resist change. Through this analysis I suggest tailored strategies for interventions for each configuration.

In my participatory research practice, I worked with participants to make use of both kinds of analysis to better understand their social context and to see the impacts of their actions. In line with the STEPS Centre's dialogical approach to complexity, participants were able to see different depictions of the 'hard systems' – the various social networks – and at the same time create narratives to incorporate the relevant aspects of the system to make sense of their experiences over the course of the project.

This use of multiple techniques to capture complexity within multiple streams of analysis is one effective way of operationalising complexity for social change research. Based on the interests and capacities of participants, tools may be selected that are highly technical (and potentially highly computational) or highly metaphorical. These can be mixed and matched in a way appropriate to the interests and demands of participants, and this can be facilitated by a participatory research design.

8.5. Methodological contribution

Action research has a long history of bringing researchers and local people together to co-create knowledge about how to create social change (Greenwood, 1999; Reason and Bradbury, 2007a). Action research has even been a response to the intuition that social knowledge cannot be known in the same way as positivist scientific knowledge (Fals Borda, 2007), that it is contingent, partial, and embedded in a complex systemic context (Flood, 2007; Midgley, 2000). Systemic Action Research is a methodology that has emerged as an intentional attempt to capture that complex systemic context within action research practice (Burns, 2007). This method typically brings participants with a plurality of voices from diverse perspectives across the social system into a facilitated process of mapping the actors, issues, and conceptual linkages relevant to a research topic (Burns, 2012, 2011). As a methodology, SAR has followed the traditional action research scepticism of positivist knowledge. As such, there has been a reluctance to incorporate more technical analytical methods to capture complexity.

At the other extreme, researchers in the tradition of the Santa Fe Institute – one of the pioneers in the study of complex systems – tend to approach problems of social complexity in a completely positivist way. For example, Louis Bettencourt and Geoff West of the Santa Fe Institute have pioneered an approach to explaining the scaling of cities by showing a statistical relationship between such seemingly unrelated phenomena as average walking speed, number of patents applications filed, and miles of telephone cables (Bettencourt et al., 2007, 2010). For his part, Joshua Epstein (2007), from whom I took the ‘generative’ approach to capturing complexity, has suggested that computational agent-based models are the only valid means of explaining the emergence of social phenomena. For him, the advantage lies in the fact that computational agent-based models are as formal as a mathematical equation, but they incorporate stochastic probabilities so that their outcomes are as dependent on random chance as the real phenomena they are meant to explain.

This is why David Byrne (2005, 1998) calls this positivist approach to capturing complexity ‘deterministic complexity’ – the models incorporate randomness, but they are still designed to reveal the same patterns every time. While I think agent-based models can be useful tools for exploring complex social systems, they are clearly better suited for physical systems. In human social systems, so much of what is relevant to the functioning of the system is located in the intangible realm of constructed meaning that can vary from person to person yet still manage to exist at a collective level.

In this thesis, I have attempted to bring both of these approaches – the constructivist approach traditionally taken by action researchers and the positivist approach traditionally taken by ‘social physics’ – to bear on the issues of informal settlements. In chapter 3 I outlined my methodological approach. I followed the SAR methodology through which I engaged with PRIA, Chetna, and the SIC participants to learn about the relational dynamics, mediation processes, and collective action processes in the system. I followed a Social Network Analysis methodology (SNA) to learn about relational structures in the system and how they were changing over the course of the SCSVUP project. Both of these methodologies were applied to their respective domains. For areas of constructed meaning, SAR was more appropriate. For areas of quantifiable structures, SNA was more appropriate. One of my major methodological contributions was that I brought both of these epistemological approaches together.

However, my research did not simply involve using two different methodologies for two different system domains. Another methodological contribution was synthesizing these two approaches so that they were able to inform one another. Qualitative information about how people related to each other and why they did so informed my reading of the social networks. Abstract network metrics alone can only offer a shallow picture. Coupled with qualitative data about the nature of connections allowed me to deepen the structural analysis; for example, I was able to identify patronage relationships using qualitative data and compare that to network metrics that gave their own insights into who likely patrons were given their positions within the network.

Further, the network analysis was able to show how relational structures had changed over the course of the first few months of the SCSVUP project in which SIC groups were formed in the seven settlements. This positive information about the impact of change action was then available to the participants to inform their future actions. While social change often happens slowly and the drudgery of organizing work can make one numb to incremental changes, the quantitative analysis showing exactly how participants' network positions had strengthened in response to their organizing work provided a significant affirmation of impact which also boosted the participants' confidence to carry on.

Making the technical analytical methods accessible and useful to the participants through shared data collection, analysis, and facilitated discussion was a third methodological contribution. Technical analytical methods can be very powerful tools for creating knowledge. They are often an important potential contribution that outside academic researchers can bring to development interventions. However, they are not likely to realise their potential impact if they are simply applied in a situation without regard to the relational context. As with so many elements of action research, the choice to use a particular method in a particular way should be made together by the participants. Only if the participants are interested and invested will they be able to adopt the method and own the findings.

In my case, I used the social network analysis methodology because I perceived it to be the most effective way to capture relational structures and how they changed over the course of action. PRIA and Amrita were also enthusiastic about learning how to use it, and they wanted to incorporate network analysis into their SCSVUP project. The SIC member participants were also able to engage with the data collection and

analysis process. It was challenging to explain the full story of the networks to many of the SIC members. Some, like Dinesh from Ambedkar Nagar, immediately understood the implications of the network data: that Ambedkar Nagar was an important network hub and that other settlements were not progressing as quickly as hoped because of their lack of strong connections (see chapter 4, box 7). Others were not able to understand the analysis at a deep level. It is clear that the participants and the research as a whole benefited from synthesizing the two approaches to learning about complexity, especially by ensuring that both approaches were participatory and meaningful for the participants.

However, the experience of making the technical methods accessible and participatory was challenging. In the context of a co-created research project, choices about which methods to use and how much time and resources to devote to carrying them out were not mine to make alone. My experience suggests that it is worth devoting substantial time to working with partners to carry out technical methods, but that technical methods will be much more meaningful and truly serve to strengthen community research capacities when community participants are fully invested in the method from the beginning.

8.6. Importance for development practice

The Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) represented an important policy opportunity for people living in informal settlements. The policy itself is incredibly progressive – making arrangements for flexible financing from the Central Government, State and Local Governments, and the residents to provide ownership of high quality housing to people living in urban poverty. It requires local participation to survey, plan, and maintain the improvements. However, policy on paper is no indicator that such outcomes can be achieved.

The SCSVUP project hoped to leverage PRIA's prominent position within Indian civil society to make a positive outcome more likely. The pathway they chose to pursue this was the Indian Alliance style of organizing project. In following this pathway, PRIA and Chetna learned the importance of organizing practice in building relational power and strengthening agency. Empirical evidence from my observations of this process suggests that for NGOs to effectively intervene to contribute to strengthening agency of people living in informal settlements, they must build genuine, reciprocal relationships. My thesis demonstrates that these new relationships, if genuine,

can create the conditions for extending a political society (as well as an analogous civil society) repertoire to more effective ways of relating. I demonstrated how new relationships can impact agency by looking at the new relational dynamics, the impacts on mediating relationships including the *parshads*, and the impacts on relational structures. I further demonstrated that the new relational structures can directly strengthen agency by improving the structural positioning of participants in their social networks. I demonstrated how these new relational dynamics and relational structures can make new forms of collective action possible. In the Media Meet and City Consultations, participants performed a newly empowered status and experimented with a new way of interacting with public figures. In doing so, they experienced some challenges and pushback. This is only to be expected.

Without advocating a naïve optimism, my research suggests there is no room for the kind of cynicism about creating social change common in some of the literature. Social change requires system change, and social systems are incredibly complex. In this thesis, I have provided a number of techniques for incorporating that complexity into analysis. Not every context will function exactly as the seven settlements in my research did. However, I have demonstrated that, even over a time frame as short as one year, it is possible to build genuine relationships, foster the emergence of a nascent organization, lead to new relational dynamics, take new types of collective action, and learn from it all using technical but participatory analysis. I have demonstrated that, even if the magnitude of change is small, it is possible to measure it with a reasonable degree of certainty.

8.7. Scope for future research and limitations

A year and a half after I left Raipur upon completing my field work and my role in the SCSVUP project, I returned to the city as a tourist. A friend with whom I had worked at PRIA was getting married in a nearby city. When I returned, I went to visit the SIC members. In Gandhi Nagar, I was spotted by an SIC member as I approached the edge of the settlement. He took me to Ragini's house where we sat and had a long talk. They insisted I return for dinner with them. I prepared *rajma* and they prepared *dal chaval*, and we shared our food in Ragini's home - the site of so many discussions and where she had been bitten by a snake during the monsoon.

In Ambedkar Nagar, I caught up with Dinesh. He had been in bed for most of the previous year with Tuberculosis, and was just getting his furniture workshop up and running again. He had lost his entire life savings, but was hopeful since he still had his workshop and a group of men that he could build furniture with. I asked him about the SIC. He said, ‘Oh, yes, that group. We still talk of course, but we are not active at the moment. But if you come any day and ask us to join in any project, we’ll be there in a minute’ (Dinesh, January 2015, informal conversation). Nevertheless, I learned that new SIC groups had eventually been formed in ten new settlements – increasing the number, at least nominally, to 17.

In Shakti Nagar, I visited Janisha and Motilal. She and her family were the only ones still living there. In the recent election cycle, the *parshad* had (allegedly) removed all the names of people from the settlement from the voter rolls so that they could not vote against him. After his re-election, he had (allegedly) used his connections to Congress Party bosses to get the entire settlement bulldozed. However, Janisha and Motilal would not leave. Their milk stall was there, and their lives were there. They would not be relocated. Some of the other settlement residents had accepted BSUP houses, but the rest were left without a place to go. When I asked how she had managed to stay, she said she had some connections now to the BJP, and they were helping her file a complaint about the vote suppression. Perhaps it was because of connections she made through the SIC. What is clear in this case was that she was unable to shift her relational configuration with the *parshad*. What had happened was that the unstable pattern had collapsed as the *parshad* had managed to tip the power balance in his favour once and for all.

In visiting after a year and a half, it was clear to me that things had changed, and yet things remained the same. Shakti Nagar had lost its struggle with its *parshad* and against eviction, yet Janisha and Motilal still carried on their struggle. Aditya, living in the *kushta basti* part of the settlement, had not been evicted, and he was also carrying on his organizing work for people with leprosy. Dinesh had nearly died and lost most of his meagre savings, but he was carrying on as well. The SIC groups had expanded, but their status was unclear to me. Missing 18 months of everyday contact and communications, it was inevitable that I could no longer read the situation completely.

I have presented evidence throughout this thesis that the intervention to form SICs in the seven participating settlements had an impact, contributing to the strengthening of agency for the participants and their settlements. It is a limitation of

this research that I cannot assess the long-term impact or how sustainable changes were. Still, I read my recent visit as an affirmation that the relationships I built over the course of my research were still in place and still relevant. As of now, I have applied for one grant to extend my work with these local associations for another two years. I would like to continue working with these communities and with these NGO partners for the long term, and I would like to apply the methods I developed for this project in other contexts. I have explored the possibility of doing this in another two cities in India and three in Bangladesh as part of the Cities Cluster at IDS.

The qualitative and quantitative, constructivist and positivist, participatory and technical methods I brought to bear on this research were a step towards more effectively accounting for complexity in social systems. They were a step towards learning how to more effectively bridge differences between donor countries and developing countries, between academic researchers and community researchers, between insiders and outsiders to address the myriad issues around urban poverty, urbanisation, and development. But there is still much work to be done. I pointed out in chapter 3 that accounting for complexity in social systems is still a young field in which important foundations are still being laid. It is undoubtedly true that no one has yet figured out how to solve urban poverty and inequality. Yet, this research is a step forward on both fronts, and I hope to continue on this path.

8.8. Conclusions

This research took up the question of agency among people living in informal settlements and how it can be strengthened over the course of a development intervention. I have drawn on a range of conceptual and methodological approaches to explore this issue. Others have presented compelling evidence that a city (and urban society) function as complex systems. These findings have pointed the way regarding how micro-patterns can lead to emergent meso- and macro-phenomena. Recognizing that there is no established method for accounting for complexity in social systems, I have innovated a methodological approach that synthesizes qualitative and quantitative technical analysis with participatory constructivist methods to learn about the complexity of social change processes in Raipur. I was able to do this in partnership with PRIA and Chetna – NGOs with a long history of action research, advocacy, and

social work with people living in informal settlements in Raipur – along with many inspiring participants from the settlements who became SIC members and leaders.

My research verifies the assertion that cities and their informal settlements are complex systems that share common characteristics with other complex systems – features such as feedback loop processes, emergence, and non-linear change (such as ‘phase change’). The methods I applied were able to make important parts of the system visible – for example, the relational structures in the form of social networks and the linkages between local ‘fixers’ and the more formal *parshad* patrons.

Based on the ‘generative’ approach, I used the multiple methods to get information about system dynamics and system structures. Doing this within the context of an organizing practice that focused on forging strong relationships with and amongst the partners allowed us (the project participants) to find entry points to creating systemic change. The political society behavioural repertoire was one entry point. Recognizing the experience and skills honed through the regular public action often required by political society, we were able to extend ways of relating into less contentious and more co-productive interactions. We were able to build a new relational context in which those new ways of relating were not only possible, but effective. We were able to discover a set of attractor state relational patterns in which residents of a settlement faced unique challenges to empowerment. We were able to plan and carry out two major actions that further performed new ways of relating, challenged expectations, provided transformative experience, and revealed existing constraints on agency. This thesis tells the story of research that explored the Indian Alliance organizing approach to creating social change, which managed to incorporate technical analytical methods into a consistently participatory practice. I conclude with several points.

Firstly, this research suggests that more innovative methods are necessary to learn about how to strengthen agency and to incorporate complexity in the analysis in a non-trivial way. My thesis is a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done. I hope to do more of it.

Secondly, if the goal of the research is to learn about agency in informal settlements or urban poverty more generally, it is more effective to learn in partnership with people living in such conditions. They have more knowledge and greater capacities for learning than researchers or NGOs. Researchers and NGOs may bring greater understanding of the formal knowledge production process – including approaches to

technical analysis – but it is not possible to make use of them apart from a relational context. People living in informal settlements have agency and skills, and they are generally capable of engaging in high quality research with technical research methods, especially if properly trained and coached in the context of genuine working relationships.

Given the systemic nature of the issues around informal settlements and urban poverty, pushback is a likely response to any change action. Strengthening agency and empowerment are fundamentally about power, and development interventions that seek to partner with local people to strengthen agency must make themselves aware of local power landscapes. My research suggests that this can only be done by seeing the system through the eyes of local people, and learning, through experience, to become attuned to those power dynamics. It is unfortunate that such development interventions are typically time-bound and tied to a project schedule. My research suggests that long-term relationships can greatly increase the chances that change becomes sustainable. However, my research also suggests that even over the relatively short time frame of one year, much change can be created and documented. Making such change visible to the participants may go some way to increasing the likelihood of sustainability, and it is certainly helpful for affirming and edifying the participants in their struggles, which generally continue beyond project deadlines.

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